"In virtue of baptism, all are called to become missionary disciples"

POPE FRANCIS

& Conviction

Unpretentious Christianity

Anthony J. Gittins

VISIT…

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"Who is a Christian (identity)? How is Christian commitment related to Christian mission (life at the margins)? How is Christian mission realized today (discipleship)? Only a theologian and anthropologist as learned and wise as Anthony Gittins can help us answer these three questions with 'courage and conviction.' And don't be fooled by the subtitle of the book. Gittins's answers are anything but 'unpretentious' because they are deeply rooted in the Bible (each chapter being a challenging meditation on a biblical text!) and born of a lifelong missionary practice at the margins of society. Pick up the book and read and your life will not be the same."

— Peter C. Phan
Ellacuría Chair of Catholic Social Thought
Georgetown University

"*Courage and Conviction: Unpretentious Christianity* is a must-read for those who long to deepen the living of their faith in the contemporary global and ecclesial realities. Once again Gittins's experience, wisdom, and insights draw the reader to a depth of reflection on what is asked of us if we are to be intentional about responding to the call to discipleship. The seamless integration of Scripture in each chapter challenges readers to ponder how they are being called to live their baptismal commitment and be the presence of love in a world where so many hunger and thirst for justice. Honestly facing the questions posed throughout the book while making one uncomfortable can move one from complacency to commitment to ongoing discernment of the Spirit's invitation and action."

— Joan Marie Steadman, CSC
Executive Director
Leadership Conference of Women Religious

"Delighting in the joy of revelation, so much more life-giving than mere 'religion,' Gittins is a helpful companion no matter what road you have taken. Precisely because he knows he has not yet discovered all there is to know and love, Gittins can help you find even initial answers to the questions that won't go away."

— Thomas McCarthy, OP
Former editor of Dominican Publications, Dublin
Rector of the Basilica of San Clemente in Rome, Italy

"The urgency of this writing is not in the offering of new ideas for growing into our Christian call but in living out that call—courageously, collectively, and faithfully—in the world in urgent need of hope, healing, reconciliation, and Good News. Courage is needed to see beyond comfortably held understandings and to risk falling into the full embrace of the deeper truth and beauty of Christian discipleship. Conviction is not presented here in the tone of insistence but as participation in—and cooperation with—the Divine gifting of creative imagination and Jesus' model of discipleship. The urgency is at hand; so also is the mission 'where we are, not somewhere else,' for compassionate and inclusive encounter, upholding the dignity of diversity, loving the least among us, intercultural and countercultural witness, giving hope, and living 'holy madness.' In this book, Fr. Anthony honors Christian adults in this mission to be the vision and presence of Jesus in the world."

— Colleen Gregg
Director of Retreat Center, Sisters of Mercy

"This book is the fruit of years of deep reflection on what it means to be a Christian in today's world. Savor the wisdom, faith, and practical insights that fill every page. This is a book that should be underlined, used for prayer, and shared with others."

— Fr. Anthony Ciorra
Vice President for Mission
Professor of Theology and Catholic Studies
Sacred Heart University

"Drawing on New Testament foundations as points of reference, Gittins raises a number of soul-searching questions in ways that are provocative and unsettling, yet magnetic in their power to draw readers into deep and critical reflection on matters of conscience and consequence for mission and ministry.

— Margaret Eletta Guider, OSF
Associate Professor of Missiology
Boston College School of Theology and Ministry

COURAGE AND CONVICTION

UNPRETENTIOUS CHRISTIANITY

Anthony J. Gittins, CSSp

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CONTENTS

Introduction vii

Part 1: Identity and Commitment

Chapter One: "The Wind Was Against Them" (Mark 6:48): Facing Life's Challenges 3

Chapter Two: "Stretch Out Your Hand" (Luke 6:10); "Stand Up Straight!" (John 5:8): Restoration and Renewal 17

Chapter Three: "They Set Out at Once and Returned" (Luke 24:33): Rethinking and Recommitting to the Mission 31

Chapter Four: "It Shall Not Be So Among You" (Mark 10:43): From Domination to Communion 46

Chapter Five: "Do This in Memory of Me" (1 Cor 11:25): An Urgent Agenda for Every Christian 61

Part 2: Margins, Mission, and Diversity

Chapter Six: "Give Them Something to Eat Yourselves" (Mark 6:37): Challenges and Possibilities for Marginal Ministry 79

Chapter Seven: "My Witnesses to the Ends of the Earth" (Acts 1:8): Missionary Discipleship at the Margins 95

Chapter Eight: "As I Have Done, You Should Do Also" (John 13:15): A Christian Response to Diversity 112

Chapter Nine: "True Worship: In Spirit and in Truth" (John 4:23): Can We Get Beyond Religion? 128

Chapter Ten: "Let Us Go Elsewhere: That Is Why I Came" (Mark 1:38): Faith, Culture, Movement, and Mission 144

Part 3: Models of and Models for Discipleship Today

Chapter Eleven: "It Is Not You Who Speak, but the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13:11): A Call to Prudent, Risk-Taking Discipleship 163

Chapter Twelve: "Be Careful How You Live" (Eph 5:15): Gossip, Gospel, and God's Open Secret 178

Chapter Thirteen: "People Were Saying, 'He Has Gone Out of His Mind'" (Mark 3:21): Called to Holy Madness 194

Chapter Fourteen: "Do Whatever He Tells You" (John 2:5): Mary, the First to Hear and Respond 210

Chapter Fifteen: "By This, Everyone Will Know You Are My Disciples" (John 13:35): Would Jesus Recognize Today's Church? 224

Scripture Index 235

Subject Index 237

Author Index 239

INTRODUCTION

Three issues or topics have converged in my consciousness in recent years, provoking reflection and an intellectual, pastoral, and faith-driven response. That part of this response should take the form of a book is itself the result of a rather longer process of interaction with a variety of individuals and groups, from the United States to Europe, Australia and elsewhere; in classrooms and convention halls; among Roman Catholics, within the much broader Christian community, and beyond the structures of institutional religion.

The first stimulus was Pope John Paul's call for a New Evangelization (which goes back thirty years), and the response it generated, from confusion to commitment and from apathy to passion. The word "New" was intended to encourage renewal rather than to imply novelty, and its intended focus was on baptized but apparently only nominal Christians, not (fully) committed to living a vibrant and identifiably Christian way of life. But considerable confusion followed the papal call to action: within a very short time, upward of ninety different definitions of "New Evangelization" had appeared in print. People who were committed to the pope's initiative sometimes found themselves arguing against each other about the real meaning and application of the phrase "new evangelization." Adding fuel to the fire was the fact that the word "evangelization" was widely (mis)understood to be synonymous with proselytization or biblical fanaticism—and therefore highly distasteful to contemporary Christian

palates. Traveling to Australia, *en route* to giving talks about (new) evangelization, I fell to reading a book—at the bishop's urging—about Australian Catholics. The very first paragraph contained the stark statement that Australians hate the word "evangelization"! I wished then that I could turn the plane around, but in the event I learned much, about evangelization, about Australians, and about the power of words.

My understanding of evangelization is that it is first and foremost a description of the way Jesus himself undertook his mission, and only then is it derivatively applied to the Church and its members. If its first meaning in the New Testament is "to preach the Gospel," then Jesus was evidently its first exponent. If it is taken out of the gospel, however, and intended to mean "to convert to Christianity" as the dictionary also has it, then it is not surprising that so many people have found it distasteful. But the noun *evangelion*—the Greek origin of the English word—simply means "good news," and in the gospels its primary referent is Jesus himself. Consequently, to speak of "new evangelization" strikes many people as confusing, and some as outrageous: Jesus both proclaims and—critically—embodies the good news. His message *is* good news and so is he, for he actually incarnates it. Jesus does not merely talk about love or forgiveness, reconciliation or bonding: he does these things on a daily basis and instructs his followers to do likewise. He *is* love and forgiveness incarnate, and he exemplifies reconciliation and bonding. That is evangelization. And unless we in turn attempt to do and to be as Jesus was, whatever we might do is not authentic evangelization. And the only way we can legitimately speak of a "new" evangelization is if what Jesus himself did two thousand years ago is re-presented or renewed in our words and brought alive in our bodies wherever we may be.

The following pages attempt to describe elements of both Jesus' proclamation and his incarnation of the good news, and to identify the challenges facing each of us, called as disciples and sent as apostles.

The second impetus for this book is the living example of Pope Francis. His insistence that every Christian is called to be a

"missionary disciple" is a timely reminder to us all. And his example of choosing the margins and encountering the people who live there is itself evangelization in action. Through these pages we will be referring to and quoting from Pope Francis, especially his Apostolic Exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel."

The third issue that has served to kindle some passion is the conviction that many adult Christians today are hungry for biblical and spiritual food. Saint Paul chided the people of Corinth, saying that initially he offered them "milk, not solid food," because they were "as infants in Christ" (1 Cor 3:2), and that "even now you are still not ready." But multitudes of Christians today seem to have received very little solid food, and the "milk" they received as children—while perhaps perfectly appropriate then—simply cannot nourish or satisfy them any longer. They know that adults cannot live on milk alone, and they are hungry for more solid food. That is readily available to theologically sophisticated people, and courses or lectures on the Bible or New Testament are increasingly popular. But that leaves too many people still hungry, for they cannot undertake formal courses or gain a theology degree.

This book, then, is addressed to what used to be called "the educated layman," but most certainly to women too, whether lay or religious, single or married, waxing or waning. But it is also intended for the adult palate; it is not a book for children. Nor is it a "pious" book, in the disparaging sense of filled with pretense or hypocrisy. Such bogus piety is odious. The book is offered to people who do not lack courage or faith yet who might be further encouraged and sustained in their following of the Way of Jesus; people who go about their business with simplicity but also with passion. Hence the title, *Courage and Conviction*, and the subtitle, *Unpretentious Christianity*.

One further point might be pertinent here. It concerns culture. No one is born with culture, but everyone acquires culture. There are no mature human beings without culture. Culture is what human groups do to their environment, for good or ill. It is the form of social life, a meaning-making system, and a way of being human contextually. Language is a feature of culture,

and there are more than ten thousand languages on earth. There is no way to communicate adequately except through language, spoken, written, signed, or symbolized. But faith too can only be expressed culturally. There is no way to live one's faith except culturally. In a global church, the significance of culture as a shaper of people's faith should not be underestimated. Although every Christian is called to discipleship, each person must live his or her faith culturally (through the medium of a native or an acquired culture). This can be seen in the myriad ways in which people pray (language), worship (ritual), use their bodies, perceive nature, and approach God. Some insights from cultural anthropology are interwoven in these pages. They might help sensitize us further to the interplay of culture and faith and demonstrate that there are almost as many ways to be a disciple as there are people willing to follow the Way of Jesus. Each of us can learn much from fellow disciples.

Finally, a word about the specific content: it derives from my own encounters over recent years, with people of faith, people seeking and asking for faith, and sometimes people who feel, like the disciples, that they are, at this late stage, still "of little faith." Each chapter has been shaped around the book's theme, but the content and focus originated or saw the light of day in many different contexts.

Chapter 1 was originally a talk for the clergy of the Diocese of Albany, New York, in 2009. That was reworked much later as an address at the Convention of the National Council of Priests of Australia, in Brisbane in 2014, and that also elicited the present chapters 2 and 3. Versions subsequently appeared in the Irish Dominican Publication, *Religious Life Review* in 2015, as did several of the other subsequent chapters, between 2010 and 2016. The content for the present chapter 4 was also part of the Brisbane Convention. Those chapters are the result of rethinking, revision, and realignment for the present context and audience. Chapter 5 was born many years ago, in a place I cannot recall. But it has been reworked on several occasions, almost always for live audiences and therefore with a different presentation style.

The subject matter of a conference in Adelaide, Australia, in 2014, for an Ecumenical Association of Mission Studies (AAMS) Convention, provided the topics appearing here in a modified form in chapters 6, 7, and 8.

The issue explored in chapter 10 was presented to the Third Order Religious (TOR) Franciscans in Assisi, Italy, in 2013, while chapter 12 was a keynote for the Annual Conference of Major Superiors of Men Religious (CMSM) in Burlington, Vermont, in 2006.

In 2013 I was blessed to participate in the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (ACLRI) for New South Wales, Australia; the present chapter 13 is a condensed version of two talks at that venue. "The Marian Lecture" delivered at the Catholic College, Bendigo, Australia, in 2014 has been transmuted into chapter 14.

Finally, a presentation at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress (LAREC) in 2012 provided the topic for chapter 15, reworked and redirected from a live auditorium to the pages of a book.

Some, indeed many, but not all of the topics addressed here were first proposed to clerical and religious audiences. But every presentation offered here has been rethought and redirected to a much broader and more inclusive audience, largely because we all share the same vocation to discipleship, to which we respond in myriad appropriate and contextual ways. The chapters not otherwise identified as formal presentations grew from ideas mooted in seminars or talks and gestated over a long period, sometimes years. In all cases, any appropriate releases have been secured and the publication rights are mine as much as are the errors.

My hope is to have woven whole cloth from a variety of different strands, to have avoided repetition as much as possible, and to have produced a narrative whose component chapters flow together easily and smoothly. And my simple wish would be that whoever picks up this book will be able to find some solid food rather than simply a milk pudding or a helping of comfort food. But those who read through these pages will soon notice

my emphasis on movement from the center to the margins as a focal point of discipleship as modeled by Jesus. Writer Stephen Hunt puts his finger on the tender spot: "If you're not living on the edge, you're taking up too much space."

Christian disciples should never be pretentious, loud, or self-important, and we are not absolutely necessary. But we are contingently necessary, because God has called every one of us to live for others and make a difference in the world. So we are, in a sense, indispensable components in God's providential plan. As a cord that connects a computer to its power source, a string that ties a kite to the one who flies it, or a pipe that brings water to a village, so we are instruments in the hands of God. We are not initiators or chief executives but part of the history of salvation, as a pen is an instrument that brings words to a page. "As the branches are to the vine," so Jesus reminds us, "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). But if we abide in him, he promises that we will bear much fruit and become his disciples (15:8). With God then, all things are possible (Matt 19:26). And yet, paradoxically it seems, without us and our honest efforts, God's plan is disrupted and God's range is limited.

⋆ I use "cripple" and other politically incorrect terms intentionally, since they represent the bias and judgmentalism of many of those in quadrant #1—the powerful and self-important—in relation to less fortunate human beings.

PART 1

IDENTITY AND COMMITMENT

CHAPTER ONE

"THE WIND WAS AGAINST THEM"

(Mark 6:48)

FACING LIFE'S CHALLENGES

A Nautical Note

Boats and sailing ships, and the sailors who navigate them, depend mightily on the wind; windless, they remain in the doldrums, floating aimlessly. Without wind, all the sailors' experience and ingenuity is of absolutely no help. But if the wind should suddenly get up and blow against them—directly head-on or broadside—it can destroy and sink even the biggest boats and the surest sailors. So whoever sets sail must learn, first to read the winds carefully and with respect, then to interpret and respond to them appropriately. Fighting against the might of the wind is ultimately a lost cause.

Paradoxically, a seasoned mariner can actually sail into the wind. It is even possible to move forward in the teeth of a headwind, and the most dexterous navigators can achieve twice the speed of the wind itself, even though the idea seems counterintuitive. But this can happen only if the boat is "close-hauled" or carefully angled in such a way that the wind's power itself becomes an asset, a positive force rather than the bearer of destruction. An alternative is "tacking": sailing at an angle of forty-five degrees to the wind, and then shifting the sail and alternating the direction of wind-to-sail. Then the boat will cover a greater distance to reach its destination, but this may be the quickest and

most efficient way to advance. It is a calculated tactic, and success depends on the sailor's ability to read the wind correctly. Every mariner relies on the wind but knows that the same force that can generate additional speed can just as easily bring about disaster.

Mark's gospel describes an incident in which the wind and its destructive power threaten the lives of the disciples until Jesus comes to the rescue in the most dramatic fashion. But people of faith can read between the lines and discern a parallel and deeper story, more metaphorical than literal, but no less challenging to each of us. Just as the course of true love does not run smooth, so with life's unfolding; none of us can sail placidly through our days for very long without unexpected squalls or commotions that threaten to destabilize our previously uneventful lives. How we respond is a measure of our maturity and skill, sharpened through life's experiences, and also of our faith—a faith that should also have been maturing during the course of our lives.

Those first disciples, the apostles who lived by and on the Sea of Galilee, undoubtedly acquired skills, but they alone, as Jesus would show them, would not save their lives in a crisis like this. So what is really happening on that lake, in that storm, at the dead of night? Saint Mark has been building a composite picture of this group of men, eager but still immature in the faith. They have a lot to learn, even and ironically about sailing, their supposed *forte.*

As twenty-first-century would-be disciples of Jesus, we can profitably apply the lesson of this storm and the dramatic rescue to our own circumstances, by means of a little reflection, as we calculate our current position, the direction of the "wind" of the Holy Spirit, our expected destination, and our chances of safe arrival rather than shipwreck. Furthermore, we may need to reflect on the irony in our own lives, when our presumed strengths are exposed in all their fragility. But first we should identify the immediate context for this particular New Testament story.

Context, Challenge, Outcome

We are in chapter 6 of Mark's gospel. But in the previous chapter, after Jesus had raised Jairus' daughter, we read that these

same disciples "were overcome with astonishment" (5:43). The Greek word is *ekstasis*, which means everything from trance to complete distraction, through "utter astonishment," "amazement," "shock," "confusion," and "perplexity." The word occurs so often that we begin to realize that, rather than comprehension or commitment, astonishment or its equivalent is the disciples' standard response. Jesus then proceeds with this group to his hometown, where he meets skepticism and opposition. Now it is his turn to be "'amazed' at their lack of faith"; but Mark uses a different word (*ethaumazen*) that he applies only to Jesus, and this word "represents his own reaction to their lack of faith."[1] It is not the same as the incredulity of his disciples or the crowds so much as his own heavy-hearted disappointment as their teacher or mentor. Evidently Jesus expects more of people, especially his own extended family and these handpicked disciples. His disappointment would only increase to the very end, until the other "mighty wind"—heralding the Holy Spirit—would at last utterly transform them at Pentecost.

Nevertheless, Jesus commissions these disciples as apostles ("those who have been sent"), and they, often called "the Twelve," go off full of excited optimism and return full of themselves: "They told him all that they had done and taught," but Jesus immediately responds by saying with some urgency, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). The Greek verb implies recuperation from some depleting experience (like our own "R and R"), except that Jesus himself invariably seeks such revival or restoration through contemplation, connecting with his *abba* whenever he has been depleted or worn out by his ministry. But every time Jesus finds some badly needed temporary seclusion, enormous crowds seek him out and converge again, eager for more miracles.

This provides the testing ground for the apostles' maturity. Jesus once more "had compassion for [the crowds]; . . . and

[1] John R. Donohue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 186.

began to teach them many things" (v. 34). But this compassionate response greatly irritated the Twelve, whose immediate reaction (their pastoral response) is to tell Jesus to get rid of the people! But Jesus says, very pointedly, "*You* give them something to eat" (exactly the same instruction that Jairus and his wife were given when their daughter was raised; Jesus will always challenge people to do whatever they can, before they look for miracles). The apostles' bankruptcy becomes evident at this point, when they declare that they have nothing to offer: evidently they have even less imagination than resources. So Jesus intervenes and saves the day. By now it is late, and Jesus is even more in need of solitude, but also quite aware of the limitations of his disciples. So he dismisses them, with the simple instructions to sail to Bethsaida—surely, one assumes, something these fishermen sailors could manage without supervision or undue stress!

As we look back through Mark's narrative, an interesting picture gradually emerges, only becoming fully focused when Jesus later joins the terrified disciples in the boat. Jesus never presented himself as a cheap miracle worker, much less a celebrity figure: hence the "messianic secret"—his vain attempt to persuade those he healed not to broadcast his miracles or works of power. Rather, he came looking for, and sowing seeds of, faith. Strictly speaking, Jesus was a *faith healer* rather than a *miracle worker*. He emphasized that faith makes miracles, and he knew perfectly well that rarely did miracles alone produce faith. There were plenty of charlatans around, promoted as miracle workers. So, first seeking faith in Israel, he had gone with the Twelve to his own hometown, only to be deeply saddened by their response. It is only later—after the pivotal encounter with the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24//Matt 15:21)—that Jesus will cast a much wider net and look elsewhere for indications of faith, among the marginalized and insignificant.

This leads us to a personal reflection on the storm on the lake, its literal and metaphorical messages, and its implications for us.

Contrary Wind or Contrary Disciples?

While Jesus is deep in contemplation far from the lake, the disciples are on the verge of disaster, "straining at the oars against an adverse wind." For veteran sailors this should not have been a reason for panic, but, significantly, something was already seriously amiss. Different translations locate the source of the problem differently. Mark says that *they* were the source of the problem, but if "*the wind* was against them," the problem is the wind itself. What should we make of this? Can we distinguish the aggressor from the victim here? This is important in view of the way the story continues. "[Jesus] got into the boat with them and the wind ceased"—or alternatively, "ceased/stopped/died down/abated" (v. 51).

The wind here clearly evokes the *ruah* or the breath of God. There is no distinct word for "spirit" in the biblical languages, and the words "wind" or "breath," are often used metaphorically. The Greek word *pneuma* carries explicit theological connotations of "spirit," but the word in this text is simply the meteorological referent, the "wind": *anemos.* Nevertheless, Mark has intentionally shown us a number of indications of the immaturity of the disciples' faith, and he may well be pushing a very theological point here, since, at the very moment Jesus got into the boat, "the wind ceased." As one commentator reminds us, "The wind is invisible, unpredictable, uncontrollable [and] bears down on everything in its way."[2] Up to this moment, the disciples have clearly been getting "in the way" of the Spirit, rather than following *the Way* of Jesus. And now they are fighting, unsuccessfully, against the wind (the Spirit of God). But when Jesus joins them, there is no fight left in them and no need to struggle. There is no disharmony between Jesus and the Holy Spirit, so once Jesus is with and among his disciples, tranquility is restored. Everyone is now on the same side and at peace: the disciples are no

[2] George S. Hendry, "Holy Spirit," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 287.

longer fighting against the wind (Spirit); nor is the wind (Spirit) against them.

Applying the Lessons

This sequence of events is marked once again by the characteristic "astonishment" or "amazement" of the disciples. It began with the raising of Jairus' daughter, proceeded to Jesus' visit to his hometown, and demonstrated the disciples' impotence in the face of five thousand hungry men (not counting the women or children who would have increased the number to upward of fifteen thousand people if we know anything about family sizes or women's interest and devotion). In this final scene, the disciples' astonishment has turned to cold fear. All this can surely provide us with much food for thought. How might we apply the lessons to ourselves at this moment in the story of the church wherever we happen to be? In the forty verses of chapter 6 of Mark's gospel, here is a potentially significant insight: Mark consistently shows the weak side of the disciples, the side Matthew covers up or overlooks.

After all the drama and even with the evidence of Jesus' identity, the disciples are yet again "utterly and completely dumbfounded, [and] their minds were closed," says Mark (6:52).[3] They are exposed as men who still have an awful lot to learn (and "a learner/to learn" is simply the meaning of the word disciple). They have a long way to go; they are still very volatile; and Mark gives them a terrible midterm report that stands in stark and striking contrast to Matthew's glowing assessment. He says that when Jesus joined them, "those in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly, you are the Son of God' " (Matt 14:33): a completely different picture! Naturally, the author of Matthew's gospel identifies himself with the apostles and consistently spares their blushes. He also blames the mother of James and John for asking for the seats on Jesus' right and left (Matt 20:20). But she is not even present in Mark's account! He, by contrast, puts the

[3] Jerusalem Bible (JB) translation.

blame squarely on the brothers and then says that the rest of the apostles were indignant—not, apparently, because James and John were out of line, but because they preempted everyone else (Mark 10:35). Mark exposes the disciples as only too human and their faith as wafer-thin: lacking understanding and with closed minds.

If we consider ourselves to be disciples, maybe we have chosen more Matthew-like images, and a dose of Mark's realism comes as a much-needed, if painful, corrective. But Mark also constantly emphasizes that disciples need a deep and personal relationship with Jesus, as a way to strengthen and deepen their faith. This is surely an appropriate reminder for us all. The outcome, of course—after the strong wind of the Spirit blew at Pentecost—was that these very same immature disciples did finally come of age and fulfill the promise Jesus had placed in them from the beginning. Nevertheless, commentators in recent years have gone so far as to say that the Twelve (particularly in Mark's account) are the negative blueprints of discipleship. In other words, if you want to know what *not* to do, look at these men. By contrast, the women—widely overlooked or undervalued (and no gospel ever applies the word "disciple" to a woman; only once in the entire New Testament is a woman explicitly called disciple: Tabitha in Acts 9:36)—the women are the positive examples.[4] If we aspire to faithful discipleship, the women should be among our primary exemplars, although we can also learn a great deal from the men's mistakes. In fact, their weakness can be a source of some encouragement to us. If Jesus' handpicked chosen ones were so fallible and slow to learn, there is still hope for us.

Questions for the Road

Three questions might help focus our attention. Faced with an enormous crowd of needy people, the disciples seemed to panic

[4] Denis Sweetman notes Mark's propensity to portray the Twelve "warts and all"; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has long advocated on behalf of the women as prime examples of courage and enduring faith.

or freeze. Their best response was to try to get rid of the problem. "Send them away," they said. We noted Jesus' command, that they should give them something. But that seemed quite unrealistic in the circumstances. Yet it raises our first question.

1. What do we have to share, to give to hungry people dying for nourishment? Perhaps we truly believe we have nothing left. Perhaps we have simply run out of ideas. If our conscience is sensitive to others' needs, maybe we resent the constant demands made on us. Or maybe we are frankly burned out. Although we might have some of these reactions, we have to believe that Jesus never asks for the impossible. He did warn the Twelve that discipleship is impossible for them alone. But he added that, with God, everything is possible (cf. Mark 10:27). And that is what must sustain us. The very fact that Jesus challenges and strains the resourcefulness of his disciples indicates that he knows very well that they can do *something*, even if they don't know it yet. Yes they are tired after their missionary journey, and Jesus has just called them to come away with him for some solitude and rest (Mark 6:3, 31). But suddenly the unexpected happened and a real pastoral need is evident. For Jesus to ask his disciples to take action rather than to seek the limelight himself shows a real spirit of affirmation and trust. But what can they possibly give? Their immediate reaction is negative, unhelpful, and defeatist: clearly they do not yet have the spirit of Jesus. But with his help their attitude changes, they involve the crowd, and they discover that there *are* indeed resources, meager though they seem. When Jesus then compensates for the deficiency, "all ate and were filled" (Mark 6:43).

For people of faith, the lesson is clear: we *do* have resources, though we may be stretched rather thin. But a great deal depends on the attitude, that spirit of hope that we bring to the pastoral challenges, individually and collectively. There is simply no place for defeatism and dis-spiritedness. As disciples, whatever our position, whether of leadership, of years of experience, or simply of example, we can no more turn away when others are hungry than a mother can turn a deaf ear to the cries of her own

hungry children. Mothers are not solely responsible of course, but they are indispensable. So too, we must take seriously our call to provide people with nourishment and the means to obtain it. Realistically, we may have good cause to be pessimistic about some things, but pessimism must never degenerate into hopelessness, because hope is simply a nonnegotiable for Christians.

2. How do we recognize Jesus through our daily encounters? When the disciples saw Jesus coming to them on the water, even though they had been with him immediately before and it was he who had instructed them to row across the lake, still, "they thought he was a ghost," and Mark says explicitly: "They *all* saw him and were terrified" (6:49-50). So what about us: do we recognize Jesus when he is unexpected and perhaps even heavily disguised? This is the measure of our faith: in Jesus' own words, whatever we do or fail to do to "one of the least," we do or fail to do to him (Matt 25:40, 46). The disciples at Emmaus recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. "He vanished from their sight" but not from their presence; he was there, fixed on their retinas, held in their trembling hands, and burned deep into their memories. And we encounter Jesus daily, in some of the most unlikely people and circumstances, but we often fail to recognize him, and yet we complain because he seems absent. "O you of little faith" is a constant refrain to the disciples and to ourselves. When Jesus is hidden from our physical sight, where is our insight, our perception, our discernment, our vivid memory, and our yearning—not to mention our imagination and our contemplative reflection on some of our daily encounters? How often do we fail to look closely at the faces of the people we pass each day, especially the needy poor who seem to be everywhere and will not leave us alone? What would it take, in fact, for us to recognize Jesus in the flesh, if we have already decided that he has abandoned or forgotten us?

3. What have we failed to understand, or what do we need to understand? The disciples "did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened" (Mark 6:52). Although constantly surprised, they consistently fail to learn from the lessons Jesus

offers them. So further questions might include: have our hearts become hardened and our minds closed? This is particularly pertinent when directed at some clergy or religious who seem less than totally committed to their own professional development. Having completed seminary, some give the impression they have now completed their education, and they continue to recycle old material rather than commit themselves to lifelong learning, which is another description of discipleship. From those to whom much has been given, much will be expected, and those in leadership positions in the church must be accountable for their personal example of discipleship.

The Twelve were tainted with this particular infection, sometimes overreaching themselves, looking for privilege, and expecting preferential treatment. Yet in the end, ten of them ran off and one killed himself. We too have failed to understand, about the loaves and about so much else. We remember when Jesus drew a metaphorical line in the sand, insisting, "My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink" (John 6:56), and provoking from "many of his followers" the response, "This teaching is difficult" (John 6:60; "intolerable language" in the Jerusalem Bible). Jesus asked the Twelve directly, "Do you also wish to go away?" and we might imagine that at this moment some of them did. But Peter, for once, spoke up and spoke for all. "To whom can we go? . . . We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69). This is the hope we cling to, though there is probably not one among us who has not struggled to answer the question, which is not "*Will* you go away?" but "Do you *want to* go away?" Sometimes we surely want to, but by the grace of God we will not.

Recognizing a Familiar Voice

Jesus identifies himself with the God of the Hebrew Bible by the phrase "I AM," or "I AM WHO I AM." But for me the opaque phrase holds a special meaning. As a young missionary in West Africa, having trekked to a distant village I met an old blind

man. He told me his name was Nabi Yagba and he asked for mine. *Kpelle wa* ("Big beard"), I said, the name the people had given me, for obvious reasons at the time. It was more than six months before I returned to the village—and there was none other than Nabi Yagba, sitting on a wooden chair in front of his hut! I had remembered him (and had practiced saying his name), and I greeted him by calling his name. He was blind, so he responded, "Who are you?" Instead of saying my special name, I simply said, "It's me." "Ah, *kpelle wa*, 'Big Beard!' " he said immediately and with delight! My voice and his own memory were enough for him to identify me correctly after all that time.

When the disciples ask the ghostly figure on the lake to identify himself, I imagine that what Jesus is really saying is not the (to our ears) very obscure "I AM WHO I AM" but simply, "It's me!" because he expects them to know who he is. We only say "it's me!" when we are talking to someone who already knows us and whom we expect to recognize us by a combination of our voice and their memory. So Jesus says, "It's me; do not be afraid." And when I answered Nabi Yagba in his language by saying "It's me," what I was saying, literally translated from his Mende language into English, was "I am" or "I am the one"—effectively the same response as Jesus: "I am who am"!

We can ask again, therefore: do we really recognize Jesus in our daily encounters, or is he still a stranger like he was on the road to Emmaus? Do we have enough familiarity with his voice and the way it touches and stimulates our memory? And if so, does it make us afraid? Do we recognize his voice in the beggar on the corner; in the desperation of the person who phones late at night; in the pain of someone who asks us, "Why, why, why has my child died, my spouse abandoned me, my boss fired me?"; or in the anguish of the pregnant teenager who wants help and not condemnation? And do these voices make us afraid, make us want to run away, not pick up the phone or sit down and look into the suffering eyes? Deeper even than all that is another fear: the fear that our own faith is faltering and that it might already be too late. We recall that after the first flush of success, the apostles became

rather full of themselves, only to discover their powerlessness. And Jesus warned them that "only through prayer" would they be effective (Mark 9:29).

When the winds buffet and the seas rise up, when we fear our boat will sink or we will drown, what recourse is there for us, people of little faith? Who will care for us as we try to care for others? In a world with so many problems and among people with so many needs, how will we manage, not simply to survive, but to thrive?

A Provisional Conclusion

We return to the beginning: is the wind against us, or are we against the wind? If the former, causing us to feel victimized, paralyzed, or depleted, we may need to drop or trim our sails, go with the flow, and relax a little, lest we burn out by overwork and lack of support. Or we may need to tack into the wind, taking full advantage of the power of the Spirit, to push on further and deeper in our commitments, and to feel again the exhilaration and passion we once knew. But if we are against the wind, we need to be very, very careful. We cannot overcome the Spirit, however much we resist; and if we are contrary to the Spirit, we need a radical realignment, a real conversion of heart, lest we founder and capsize. Recall that the apostles would have been perfectly able to ride out the storm if they had adjusted the sails and turned into the wind. Their major failure was not incompetence but a collective loss of nerve. Immobilized by fear and nearly hysterical, they almost drowned.

Finally, here is a cautionary tale. As the nineteenth century was turning into the twentieth, the thoughts of novelist and poet Thomas Hardy were turning to thoughts of death. He was himself turning sixty years old, introspective and even melancholy. On a bleak winter's day nothing stirred, nature seemed dead, and people were huddled in their homes. In a beautiful poem, he wrote that "every spirit upon earth seemed fervourless as I." Suddenly a bird—the European song thrush—began to sing "in

a full-hearted evensong of joy illimited." It was, he says, "an agéd thrush," but it sang its heart out simply because it was a song thrush. By his judgment, all around was bleak and hopeless, but he was suddenly inspired by this insignificant bird and says that he felt the kindling of "some blessed hope" that inspired the bird but had previously deserted him. The song thrush is born to sing. It must sing, for that is its destiny, even though it is "frail, gaunt, and small." Henry David Thoreau said "some people lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them." The song of the thrush enkindled Hardy's spirit, and he lived a further twenty-eight very productive years.

The Darkling Thrush

I leant upon the coppice gate,
When Frost was spectre-grey,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky,
Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
Had sought their household fires.
The land's sharp features seemed to be
The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;
An agéd thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

—Thomas Hardy, 1840–1928

We too are called to sing, because that is our destiny: to sing the praise of God in prayer and good works as disciples of Jesus. We will not give up hope or succumb to the contagion of depression or dis-spiritedness, because we are people of faith and hope who also ask for greater faith and more abiding hope. So, for God's sake and for the sake of ourselves and the people we encounter, let us not go to the grave with the song still in us; let us sing it—in Thomas Hardy's words—"in a full-hearted evensong, of joy, illimited."

CHAPTER TWO

"STRETCH OUT YOUR HAND!"

(Luke 6:10)

"STAND UP STRAIGHT!"

(John 5:8)

RESTORATION AND RENEWAL

One Day at a Time

By its achievements and the transformations that would never have happened without it, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) has always been a source of inspiration, as are the people whose lives this organization has challenged, chivvied, and changed. And yet there is relatively little structure, few rules, and no rush to judgment involved. It is a fellowship rather than a formal organization, and a society of peers (hence the anonymity) rather than a clash of competitive egos. Its success is attributed to the sharing of experiences, the moral support of the sponsors and members of the wider community, the strength and determination (rather than the weakness or the past history) of its acknowledged alcoholic members, and the sense of hope it inspires and maintains in those same sufferers who refuse to surrender, striving to live "one day at a time."

To admit or acknowledge powerlessness over alcohol or any addiction is not to perceive oneself as completely without power, much less to give in to despair. On the contrary, those who acknowledge weakness in one area and yet show determination in

another succeed partly because of the endorsement of the wider group and partly because of the power of their own personal dedication, perseverance, and hope. Members of AA know that they are only one day or one drink from disaster, and yet, curiously, this is their strength; by keeping that awareness clearly before them, they are unlikely to become arrogant or independent of a support group.

When Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent [the learned and clever] and have revealed them to infants [mere children[1]]" (Matt 11:25), he was contrasting people who think they know it all and can manage on their own (the self-imagined "wise, clever, learned") with people who know they have a lot to learn but need constant reminders of that fact (those designated "infants, mere children"). Discipleship is open to anyone and everyone, provided they are willing to learn—from Jesus. When Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche, was asked who he thought Jesus was referring to when he spoke of "the poor" whom he called blessed, Vanier said: "Anyone who cannot cope on their own or independently—and who is willing to admit it." Members of Alcoholics Anonymous are exemplars of this. Blessed are those among us who can acknowledge our own need and take appropriate action. The dividing line between the disciples of Jesus and the rest was not a matter of intelligence, achievement, or status (think of tax collectors and fishermen: "low-life" in today's language) but simply a matter of willingness to admit they still had some way to go and willingness to learn from their Teacher, Jesus.

What Is Our Problem?

Some of the difficulty that the Catholic Church (both as an institution and as a community of individuals) has experienced in recent years can surely be identified if we take a closer look at some of its, and our own, attitudes. At the institutional level, our

[1] Words in square brackets are Jerusalem Bible translation, in the future marked simply JB.

church has tended to assume its entitlement to unqualified trust and respect, and some of its ostensibly responsible servants and leaders have shown an astonishing and frankly outrageous lack of accountability, a degree of complacency, and some arrogance, not to mention *hubris*, which in Greek tragedy was blatant defiance of the gods, or God. These flimsy veneers have now been stripped away to reveal, once again, the wisdom of Lord Acton's famous observation that "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

As with physical illness, so with moral infirmity: there can be no healthy prognosis unless the patient is willing to cooperate with those who wish to help with the healing process. The organization or confraternity of Alcoholics Anonymous is actually powerless until an individual first admits that the pretense of perhaps many years is no longer convincing even to him- or herself. Likewise, people who hear Jesus—and this must include everyone, titled prelates and ordinary people alike—cannot become authentic disciples until they admit that they still have a lot to learn. And just as an alcoholic person's recovery cannot be accomplished simply by goodwill or book-learning, so no one can become a self-taught disciple. People may teach themselves some theology (knowledge *about* God), but discipleship is much more intimate. It requires the careful building of a relationship, of actually coming to *know* God, and the teacher is always and only Jesus. One of Vatican II's most pastoral statements is the following: "Those who have received from God the gift of faith in Christ, through the church, should be admitted with liturgical rites to the catechumenate which is not merely an exposition of dogmatic truths and norms of morality, but a period of formation in the entire Christian life, an apprenticeship of suitable duration, during which the disciples will be joined to Christ their teacher."[2] And Jesus himself pointedly reminds his own inner circle not

[2] "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes*)" 14, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

to get ahead of themselves: "Nor must you allow yourselves to be called Teacher, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ" (Matt 23:10 [JB]). The institutional church and some of its most influential executives seem too often to have forgotten this clear warning, but true discipleship requires lifelong learning from Jesus the Teacher, the Christ, and there is no "Passing Out," no graduation ceremony this side of the hereafter.

Picking Up the Jesus Story

After walking on the water, Jesus saved Peter when he was drowning, and then both of them joined the rest of the terrified disciples in the boat. Whether, as Matthew's account tells us, "they all bowed down and worshipped him" (Matt 14:33 [JB]) or whether we ponder Mark's more sober conclusion, that "they were utterly and completely dumbfounded" because they had not understood about the bread, and "their minds were closed" (Mark 6:51-52 [JB]), one thing is clear: this was not the end of their journey. They still had a long way to go and a lot to learn and accumulate, but not without some resistance and further falls from grace.

It is instructive to compare the two gospel accounts of this incident. Mark's Jesus says to Peter, "Courage; do not be afraid!"—a clear indication of Peter's fear and in dire need of encouragement. Matthew's Jesus is perhaps even more helpful for us: When Peter says rather tentatively and conditionally, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water," Jesus immediately says "Come!" Peter, with more bravado than bravery, impulsively jumps out of the boat. And then, after the near-disaster, "Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him" (Matt 14:28, 31). If we assume that Matthew the apostle was actually there, it stands as one of the most encouraging statements of the New Testament. Imagine what it could do if you and I could take it to heart: "Jesus immediately reached out his hand at once and caught *me*."

How, then, might we hope to survive as disciples struggling on stormy seas in today's church? Perhaps our attitude is like that

of the disciples in Matthew's account, who simply bow down and worship Jesus and find deep peace in that. Or maybe we identify more truthfully with Mark's disciples, still struggling to understand what is happening all around. Like them, we may not be quite able to identify who, and where, Jesus is as we struggle each day, at times almost overwhelmed by what seems like an interminable and losing battle against a headwind. But by God's grace we will persevere, one day at a time.

Men and Women Disciples: Beyond Generalizations and Stereotypes

Generalizations are dangerous and rarely stand up to close scrutiny. But with that caveat in mind, we may tentatively consider one such as a stimulus to further reflection. This risky generalization would compare and contrast men and women, both in today's church and in the life and teaching of Jesus. By emphasizing the contrast rather than the similarities, each of us might more easily identify how we are being called to a continuous conversion from our current attitudes: conversion to those we encounter in their God-given differences, and conversion to the mind and heart of Jesus himself. In this way we might be better able, in the words of St. Richard of Chichester, "to see [God] more clearly, love [Christ] more dearly, and follow [Jesus] more nearly, day by day."

Speaking only to men, and specifically to his own clergy, one archbishop[3] reminded his listeners that men "struggle with [the notion that] weakness may be something [potentially] positive. Weakness doesn't match up to a profile of a strong [masculine] type."[4] In view of this limitation (denial of personal weakness or failure to identify with and learn from the weakness of Jesus), said the archbishop, "the church must help them." But "the church"

[3] Archbishop Prowse, of Canberra, Australia, in an address in May 2014.

[4] Mark Brolley, "Success-Focused Men Don't Get Faith," *The Tablet* (May 10, 2014): 30.

of which he speaks is, of course, partly composed—and, clerically speaking, *totally composed*—of men. "In our weakness," said the archbishop, "we entrust ourselves to God's redeeming and merciful love." This, of course, is politically correct language in a church deeply compromised by the scandal of clerical sexual abuse, and theologically it is also quite appropriate. But we—men in general and clergy in particular—must first acknowledge our weakness and guilt by association, and not just internally, privately, or simply among ourselves.

A significant part of Catholics' and others' disenchantment with "the church," is a—specifically our—institutional failure to admit weakness, a flaw that is endemic within the clerical ranks. But none of us, clerical or lay, is immune, and all of us bear some responsibility for being part of a group that is seen to judge others while the beam in its eye almost blinds it to its own pathology. "Pride cometh before a fall,"[5] and the sin of clericalism is to present the clergy as intrinsically superior or above reproach, to expect too much deference from others, and then to sit in judgment while carefully covering our own feet of clay. Even worse: if and when our sin becomes undeniable, we have a tendency to expect nonjudgmental sympathy and understanding from everyone.

As a generalization, then, it would seem clear that many clergy, professional men and public servants, have an intrinsic difficulty in admitting personal weaknesses. We can learn to put on a face that is sometimes a mask or disguise, and after a while it is difficult to take off. And yet we all know, in those half-waking moments before dawn, of our fallibility and feebleness. But isn't that exactly why Jesus came, to call sinners and the self-righteous and to restore us to our true stature as beloved of God? Honest soul-searching is required, and not simply cheap or easy words of encouragement to those whose life experience we do not share and cannot even imagine.

[5] This oft-quoted line is a corruption and combination of two phrases in Prov 16:18.

Having generalized about men, how much riskier is it for a man to generalize about women! But the gospel accounts, and above all the pastoral example of Jesus, surely provide us with some lessons and insights that might profit a church—an ecclesial community—in which not only are women in the majority but, save for women, there would simply be no church. To return to Mark's gospel in particular (and yet another generalization), if the men so often reveal themselves as fickle, wordy, authoritarian, and slow to learn, the women are often portrayed as faithful, bold, modest, and intuitive. In a religious and secular culture that demeans, silences, and disrespects them, Jesus shows an instinctive empathy for women. Saint Paul even proclaims, counterculturally, that in Christ there is "no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Indeed in one of his most powerful and persuasive passages, speaking specifically about the Jew/Greek divide—but his words apply to the other oppositions or polarizations within the human community—Paul declares that Jesus "has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (Eph 2:14).

Tragically and scandalously, however, the examples and assurances of Jesus have not always been honored by the very institution that claims him as founder and exemplar. Certainly, the contemporary scandal of clerical abuse has served to spotlight unspeakable injustices against vulnerable minors, but the scandalous treatment of women has a much longer and no less reprehensible history. Even today the institutional church still fails to treat women with the human dignity that is their birthright, despite protests that have been disregarded and protesters who have been summarily silenced and even excommunicated. Not only has cultural patriarchy often obscured Jesus' vision of radical equality and inclusion, but a hierarchy of power more than of service has often presumed either to silence women or to speak for them, to "represent" their interests while muting and marginalizing the women themselves. But how can any man persuasively "represent" women when the women themselves are silenced? And if the women are restrained in this way, the voices of those

who presume to represent them either fail to persuade or fall on deaf ears, only adding insult to injury thereby. Attitudes and actions like this, as theologian Jürgen Moltmann averred, may well be the sins against the Holy Spirit of which Jesus speaks so strongly (Mark 3:28-30).

So much, then, for some generalizations about men and women, respectively; every one of us is charged with the responsibility to rise to the challenges and encouragement we find in the words and actions of Jesus himself, addressed equally to women and to men. Two immediately come to mind, and their specific context might be helpful to us in ours. To one person Jesus says, "Stretch out your hand!" and to another, "Stand up straight!" He bids each of us do likewise.

"Stretch Out Your Hand!" (Luke 6:10)

One Sabbath day, Jesus was teaching in the synagogue (a setting not so removed from our own churches on a Sunday morning). "There was a man there whose right hand was withered," Luke's gospel tells us. The hand was not paralyzed, or the man would not have been able to move it, but it was shrunken and malformed. In this instance Jesus' opponents were taunting him to see just how far he would go on the Sabbath day. But he turned his attention directly toward the man and said, "Stretch out your hand!" (Luke 6:10). The man did so. His hand was restored, and the opponents of Jesus began to plot his downfall.

Part of our common vocation as Christians is to believe that what God asks is actually possible, but often we fail to take appropriate risks because of cowardice or fear of failure. Pope Francis spoke very forcefully about this: where the greater pastoral good is involved, "there is a danger of making a mistake. It is risky. But this should not stop us. . . . In fact we should always ask for forgiveness and look shamefully upon apostolic failures due to a lack of courage."[6] But the man in the gospel, quite aware

[6] Pope Francis addressing religious leaders, January 3, 2014; see "Francis Tells Religious to 'Wake the World,' Outlines Modern Struggles for Church,"

of the delicacy of the situation (when healing was construed as "work" and consequently prohibited on the Sabbath) and aware too of the hostile group in the synagogue (Luke 6:7, 11), does not hesitate. Like Peter in the storm on the lake, he takes the risk and immediately complies with Jesus' request. And just as the bent-over woman was restored to an upright posture (Luke 13:10-17), so this man's hand, along with his human dignity, was restored. Here, in public view, is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah that Jesus had read on a previous occasion on another Sabbath day in another synagogue: restoration to full humanity, health, and vigor (Isa 61:1-4).

Philosopher and theologian Beatrice Bruteau says pointedly that "the man with the withered hand stands for men"—and I suspect she refers specifically to the males of the species—"who feel their power of action is [so] inhibited, restrained, even dried up, that they are not able to act effectively. Such people lose heart; they think that nothing can be done, that it is not possible for them to get anywhere."[7] Effectively, what Jesus says to the man is, "Stretch out your hand; yes, the withered one; stretch it out! Do something. Just try!" This also brings to mind yet another occasion, when a woman suffering from chronic bleeding reached out to touch Jesus' cloak and was likewise restored (Mark 5:29). But, predictably, there are always some people who become outraged and jealous when the weak and impaired are restored. Bruteau says, "When the formerly powerless stretch forth their hands in normal strength, the power classes may be alarmed. Be prepared for that, but do it anyway. Don't hesitate. It is your right to have full life and you don't have to wait for it."[8]

She might have been talking to those who have been so terribly abused in our church in our days, and not only sexually. Often as the number of sexually abused people increased, so

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National Catholic Reporter, https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/francis-tells-religious-wake-world-outlines-modern-struggles-church.

[7] Beatrice Bruteau, *The Holy Saturday Revolution* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 109.

[8] Ibid., 110.

did the cover-up, denial, and even counter-accusations of anti-clericalism and distortion. But now that the scale of that particular form of abuse is past denying, our church is slowly coming to see that it is not only the abused who must stretch forth their hand and be healed; it is also those who were paralyzed by the scandal and unresponsive, or whose confidence was shaken and withered like the hand of the man before Jesus. If clergy present themselves as in no need of restoration, they are deemed to be in denial or even to be part of the cover-up. But if the clergy could be encouraged to stretch out the dreadfully withered hand of its corporate priesthood, not only would Jesus offer healing, and not only would many survivors be able to take further small steps to their own restoration, but the whole believing community might begin to draw closer together with a clearer understanding of the deep pain, embarrassment, and even shame that racks every one of its members in some fashion and the crying need for our corporate healing and restoration.

And yet it is not entirely clear to many of the faithful, survivors or not, that the clergy and religious in general (and this is another generalization) even admit their corporate pain and repent of their active or passive roles in the dreadful harm perpetrated by some of their members. Nor is it entirely clear whether some of the perpetrators themselves really understand how much grievous and permanent harm they have caused to the body of Christ. Apparently there are some sociopathic personalities who show no remorse or awareness of the effects of their actions. But for sure, apology alone is not enough. Without repentance, apology is shallow and hypocritical.

There is a chronic malaise in today's church. In some way, each one of us is bent over, paralyzed, suffering from a withered limb, or bleeding. But Jesus has no favorites and is no respecter of persons. It is precisely for such people that he came, but he was no magician and did not heal or restore those who did not want to be healed or restored. He forced no one, but his invitation to "stretch out your hand" is extended to anyone and everyone who is less than they are called to be. And that, in principle, includes us

all, provided we have enough self-awareness and understanding of "the other" to acknowledge our condition and our moral responsibility for our actions.

"Stand Up Straight!" (John 5:8)

When Jesus addressed blind Bartimeus, he asked him: "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51). When he encountered a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years, his question was," Do you want to be made well?" (John 5:7). The answer should be self-evident but it is not; and the question still needs to be asked of each one of us today: Do you want your unfinished life, which may include all kinds of moral brokenness—addiction, paralysis, atrophy, and the rest—to be made well again? Biblical phrases such as "to be made well" are called "divine passives": they are speech formations clearly implying that the agent is God, but they avoid naming God explicitly. So the question is, do we want God's assistance in restoring us to our full potential, even now?

Bartimeus responds immediately and wonderfully: "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus is the teacher, Bartimeus is the learner-disciple, and restoration is the promise he wants fulfilled. The sick man by the pool, however, does not answer the question directly: he addresses Jesus, not as teacher, but simply as "sir," and he says, "I have no one to put me into the pool." Is this an excuse or a sign that he is less than passionate about his own restoration? He does, however, indicate that he is trying: "While I am making my way," he says, "someone else steps down ahead of me" (John 5:7). "On the way" is a phrase intimately connected with discipleship and the Way of Jesus, so perhaps he does have the desire if not the capacity, to be on the way: he is at least making his way toward the water of regeneration. So, we might ask: in relation to Bartimeus or the sick man, where would I place myself?

Luke, particularly fond of healing stories, has an even more explicit one, referred to above (Luke 13:10-17). Again, Jesus was exposing himself to hostility and condemnation; and—not by chance one surmises—the setting is yet another synagogue and

another Sabbath day. Luke tells us, "There was a woman," using a very similar construction to the one used for the man with the withered hand. But this woman is not there by happenstance or just passing through; she was there quite deliberately, as the sentence and the verb (in the Greek original) indicate. Its first word is "behold!"—which draws readers' or listeners' attention to what follows. By implication, she had been coming faithfully (that is, because she had faith), despite eighteen years of debilitating curvature of the spine. Her condition—perhaps *asthenia* or *lordosis*—also left her powerless, vulnerable, and subject to some abuse or neglect. As soon as Jesus saw her, he declared, "Woman, you are set free." This is another "divine passive," indicating that God is the agent. Faith makes miracles. And "immediately she stood up straight [restored again, as were all the others, to full humanity] and began praising God." Luke puts no words on her lips, so how would she have praised God except with every regenerated nerve and fiber: she danced! (See also Acts 3:8 for a similar example.)

Looking at the healing stories of Jesus, we discern a pattern and an instruction we can apply to ourselves. In the words of Beatrice Bruteau again, Jesus is saying: "You are not cursed and made inactive by God, [so] you can stop being paralyzed. Get up and go about your business[9] praising God." This is a mantra each of us can and should take to heart and carry with us each day.

We come full circle, back to the fundamental reason Jesus called and sent the first disciples and instructed them to make more disciples: to carry on his mission because *the time had come* for something new (Mark 1:15). And yet it was not totally new; it had been gestating since the very beginning. Genesis 1:2 says, "A wind from God swept over the face of the waters," which commentators identify as God's very presence as the Holy Spirit. The Hebrew verb translated here as "swept" literally means "brooded." To brood in this sense is to incubate or bring to birth, as a hen will brood her eggs, never leaving them until they hatch.

[9] Ibid.

So, Jesus announces that the time has come, incubation is now complete, and new life is ready to be born. And that's the reason for apostles ("sent ones"), charged with announcing that *the time has come*, to organize community life in a completely new way and under the very noses of the occupying Romans. But in every subsequent generation and to every corner of the earth, disciples continue to be called, and then sent as apostles, to generate and sustain a critical mass of people of fierce faith and true dedication. They were not many then, and not powerful, yet they changed the world. What happened then and there should be happening here and now: the faith-filled activity of small, dedicated groups, with little or no power, but capable of changing the world.[10] As Pope Francis reminds us, we are all called, by baptism, to be disciples, and specifically missionary disciples, disciples with a mission: the eternal mission of God, earthed, embodied, and continued by Jesus.[11]

For perhaps too long, and certainly too often in the past two thousand years, some ambassadors of Christ have been tempted to *hubris*: the sin of self-importance and a spirit of independence or absolute autonomy. Initially, when Jesus sent the apostles out, they met with great success, but they were soon brought down to earth when they found themselves corporately powerless to cure a paralyzed man. Jesus explained that without prayer—that is, a deep interior faith life—they could accomplish nothing (Mark 9:29). At this present moment in the life of the Church, many people, caught up in an increasingly secularized and ungodly world, find themselves somewhat dis-Spirited and chastened, perhaps with faith shaken and self-confidence bruised. This would not be so very different from the circumstances of those who heard the prophecy of Isaiah in ancient times, or were present in the synagogue when Jesus declaimed it again on that Sabbath day in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-20).

[10] For this reflection, ibid., 209–10.

[11] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel," 2013), nos. 119–20.

Like them, many of us now know what it is to struggle, and maybe we feel powerless and wonder where God is in all the turmoil. We can no longer operate as if we were invincible and beyond reproach or need, if indeed we ever did. We should be much less complacent than previously, and with good reason. We, and the church of today, are in crisis. But we cling to the hope in God's faithfulness and Jesus' promises to give us the Spirit, the Advocate, the Comforter, and to be with us always. So when, in our reduced circumstances we hear the encouraging and empowering words of Jesus, we can indeed *stretch out our hand*; and with his help we can get up and *stand up straight* once more, to go with renewed strength to continue God's mission and our commission. There is work to be done, seed to be planted, and a harvest to be gathered. Like those who find strength in Alcoholics Anonymous, we can join the laborers and proceed one day at a time.

CHAPTER THREE

"THEY SET OUT AT ONCE AND RETURNED"

(Luke 24:33)

RETHINKING AND RECOMMITTING TO THE MISSION

Do You Understand?

It is impossible for anyone to feel the pain you feel. The closest most people come is to sympathize or empathize (as a man I can *sympathize* with a woman with scream-inducing labor pains, but I can only truly *empathize* with someone whose experience I have myself experienced). But each of us can at least strive to be compassionate, to "suffer with" others' sufferings. Our experience of our own or others' all-too-human failings, and of elements within the institutional church today, is not unique to us: historically, times of trauma have alternated with times of healing. Our challenge is to keep hope alive and to learn from the past by absorbing its lessons and not repeating its mistakes.

The crisis that had been brewing throughout Jesus' ministry came to a head during Passover in Jerusalem and lasted for three nightmare days. Having first insisted that he must wash their feet, Jesus then asked his followers, "Do you understand?" They did not, of course, and only when they finally came to understand would they become true disciples. Days later, after the trauma of the crucifixion, Jesus would pose the same question to two former disciples hurrying away to Emmaus: Did they not understand

that these things had to happen? And today the question is particularly relevant to us. It cries out from our TV screens, billboards, and neighborhoods every day: "Do you understand what is happening, and why? Do you understand the implications for migrants and refugees, for people who are exploited and abused, unemployed and uninsured, and for the whole People of God, the church?" Evidently, we still do not understand fully.

Can we possibly assimilate the notion that some recent events *had to happen* so that some hitherto invisible malignancies could be identified and treated before they metastasize and become mortal? Christ's body has been seriously debilitated, not only by the obscenity of clerical sexual abuse, but by other growing tumors, whether caused by greed, hypocrisy, sexism, racism, clericalism, or authoritarian high-handedness; by marital infidelity and the crumbling of the institution of marriage; or by the cult of rabid individualism and a wide range of addictions, from drugs and alcohol to violent pornography. No culture and therefore no part of the church is completely cancer free. What hope is there then? Can this limping body revive and leap again at Easter? Those who recall the promise of Vatican II find it difficult to comprehend the significance of many still unfulfilled hopes and promises that seemed so resolvable in the 1960s. But at times like this we are called to seek the mercy and love of God, to become channels of that mercy, and to beg forgiveness of those who have been deeply hurt by members of the church they still want to love.

Pope Francis memorably captures the attitude that should mark the church of Jesus Christ: "The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Heal the wounds. Heal the wounds. And you have to start from the ground up. The first reform must be the attitude."[1]

[1] Interview with Pope Francis, *America* (September 30, 2013): 24.

Conversion and Reorientation

What Francis is asking of us—in the name of Jesus who is the initiator of this request (which is really an imperative)—is nothing less than conversion. So let us consider again what this actually entails. The English word, from the Latin *(con)vertere*, "to turn," or *versus*, "one's back," signifies some kind of changing: a *volte face.* Because its sense is "to turn thoroughly," people typically imagine an about-turn, a turning back. The Greek *metanoia* adds a further dimension: the mind; for, *meta-noia* is repentance, indicated literally by a change of mind (Gk, *nous/noia*). Jesus alluded to this when he called the Emmaus couple *a-noia*, "mindless" or "out of [their] mind" (Luke 24:25). A change of mind or restoration to one's right mind (a mind attuned to God's righteousness) is a sign of true conversion.

Most revealing of the essence of conversion, however, is the connotation in Hebrew, the medium through which Jesus himself was thinking. *Teshuvah* is the word for repentance and conversion. It implies, as Elie Wiesel described it, an act of conscious awareness and willingness to make a commitment to the future. Jewish people today will identify the New Testament story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) as one of the quintessentially Jewish of our Christian Scriptures. The Emmaus story is surely another, as we will see. The root of *teshuvah* is *shub*, "to return home." The most significant point about the Prodigal Son and the Emmaus couple is specifically their returning *home.*

A simple turnaround (*conversio*) of 180 degrees from wherever we happen to be at any given time will not necessarily take us home. And *metanoia* means a change of mind, but that does not guarantee a mind attuned to God; it tells us nothing about where home might be. But not only does the Hebrew word mean explicitly to return *home*; it is evident that we can do that only if we already know where home is! The Prodigal Son knew: home was his father's house. And the Emmaus disciples knew too: home was back in Jerusalem. And we too know where our true "home" is, whether we think of our eternal destiny or simply of the parish or ministry in and through which we live our Christian

vocation. Our "homing device" is our conscience, and if we attend to it carefully we will always find where our true home is. Our conversion depends on our determination to change direction in order to return there.

But how does our personal conversion relate to the wider world? Theologian Donal Dorr has a beautiful reflection on the prophet Micah (6:8).[2] In the translation familiar to many, God requires "only this: that you act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God." Dorr identifies three aspects of conversion: political conversion, to public, systemic issues ("act justly"); moral conversion, to one's neighbor, known or as yet unknown ("love tenderly"); and religious conversion, to God ("walk humbly"). Hispanic theologian and pastor Orlando Costas also identified a triple focus to conversion.[3] We are called, he said, to conversion: to Christ, to culture, and to the world. Conversion to Christ is the turn toward and the commitment to the risen Jesus who has overcome the world and lives today. Conversion to culture calls us to engagement with our particular, local contacts and circumstances. But conversion to the world entails a more global outreach. When the early Christians spoke about love of neighbor, they likewise identified "the people we already know" (Costas's reference to culture) and "those we have not yet met" (his reference to the world). Both must be sought and encountered before they can be loved.

This brings us full circle, to Pope Francis's insistence on encounter. His starting point is simply this: we cannot love "people," only particular individuals. And as Viktor Frankl asserted, "To love you must encounter." This is the Way of Jesus, but there really is no other way, which is why Francis is so insistent. In "The Joy of the Gospel"[4] [EG], he says, "I invite all Christians

[2] Donal Dorr, *Spirituality and Justice* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984), chap. 1.

[3] Orlando Costas, "Conversion as a Complex Experience," in *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, ed. John Stott and Robert Coote (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980).

[4] The Joy of the Gospel (*Evangelii Gaudium*), Apostolic Exhortation, 2013, pars. 3, 7.

. . . to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them" (par. 3). Then he quotes his predecessor, Benedict XVI: "Being a Christian is . . . the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (par. 7). Every true inter-human encounter is a call to conversion.

The day after Jesus' crucifixion was a day for radical questioning too: a day of indecision, lack of clarity, the pain of isolation and betrayal, and an unimaginable future. Everything must have seemed unnaturally quiet, as nobody dared to speak or to move for fear of making things worse. What were his scattered followers doing that day? Where was their faith now, and the easy rhetoric of previous days? With the advantage of hindsight, we know that their fears would turn to joy. But where does that leave us? Do we understand, at least as much as we need for the present moment? Are we committed, in faith and hope, to put our hand to the plow once more and not look back? Are we convinced that the life of a Christian is a continuous invitation to ongoing conversion? And if so, what might that entail in the life of each one of us today?

Standing Fast and Breaking Through

There is a real and present danger, not only in civil society, but within the church, that the internal hostility generated by opposing forces might do considerably more harm than would a tolerant if not respectful pluralism. Some people conjure up a vivid description of a society in civil disarray caused by a devastating riptide of neo-liberalism in conflict with the predictable tides of public-sector governance, or by certain leadership styles in ostensibly democratic societies, painfully at odds either with popular sentiment or with ethical principles. Such a socially destructive picture is then compared to what is happening in the church, where a gathering wave of subsidiarity or devolution (generated by Pope Francis and the earlier winds of Vatican II) threatens the entrenched authority of a centuries-old, centralized, hierarchical, and clerical establishment. These respective currents

affect people in different ways, causing pain and casualties within church membership but also affecting the wider society.

As far as the contemporary church is concerned, many people have decided or felt pressured to leave, to desist, to withdraw from previous commitments, or to keep their heads down and pray that the crisis will abate. This reaction is driven largely by fear or disillusionment and motivated by an erosion of faith in the Holy Spirit, if not by cowardice or apathy. Either way, it has no place among believers and people of hope. Moreover, it has done absolutely nothing to mitigate the crisis. Today, some seminarians and clergy are judged, branded, and snubbed, and few parents feel able to encourage their children to become religious or clergy. In reaction to this, and to cumbersome new regulations and red tape, some religious and clergy themselves swear never again to reach out, to risk, or to demonstrate any form of physical affection.

This is absolutely no solution, and can only produce a caricature of authentic ministry.

We need each other in order to become human, and therefore in order to become more Godly, since the only authentic way for people to live is *humanly*: we are neither animals nor angels. We remember Pope Francis's call for nearness, proximity with the other, and we know that without appropriate expressions of adult affection, and a mature emotional range and expression, we remain stunted. We were made in order to love, and we must rediscover the time to embrace and the time to refrain from embracing. As a Frenchwoman once said, "And the day came when the risk to remain tight in the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom."[5] A tightly closed hand is a fist, and a fist cannot create human relationships, but an open hand and heart can change the world. We must recommit to integrated Christian life and ministry, which can be discovered only when the inner and the outer, the intellectual and the emotional, the pastoral and the missionary are combined.

[5] Anaïs Nin, 1903–1977. To my knowledge, the source of this quote has never been determined.

This takes time, because we cannot assume that trust has already been established before we move forward, so we are walking on unstable ground. Trust can be established only in honest, face-to-face encounters, which require people to meet at their own respective boundaries and seek a way forward together. We are called, therefore, both to stand fast and to break through. These are two aspects of a single reality, like two sides of a coin, the currency of ministry and mission. But, thank God, there is a powerful current of thought in the air, urging people to persist, to keep moving forward, to be upstanding, and to face the crisis in the contemporary church with courage and renewed hope. This current is generated by the conviction that life will never be the same again because God is making all things new (Rev 21:5). This perspective, despite some real frustration, is guided by faith and sustained by hope, if perhaps sometimes tinged with an exaggerated degree of optimism.

If paralyzing fearfulness, immobility, or retreat are not legitimate options, how are we called to continue and to face the future? However our strategies are developed, they must be missionary in nature and effect. And to be missionary or "missional" is to be committed to reaching beyond our grasp.

Missional Living

The word "missional" was generated in its present meaning from within the Presbyterian community in the 1970s and 1980s. Because the word "missionary" had such strong connotations of "over there and far away" and of activity that was often close to, if not identified with, proselytism,[6] there was a widespread but erroneous understanding that mission was a specialized vocation for the few: the intrepid, radically cross-cultural "missionaries" who took the Gospel, often for the first time, to hitherto unreached

[6] This word has been effectively retired from the theological vocabulary in the mainline Christian churches, due to its connotations of force or fear, which are unchristian.

people overseas or across national and international boundaries. That left the *ordinary* people, the stay-at-home faithful, to support, rather than to emulate, the *real* missionaries by prayer and good works, chiefly fund-raising.

By the latter part of the twentieth century, so much had changed in the wider world and in the church itself that not only were the old paradigms inadequate but rank-and-file Christians were coming to a much better understanding of their own dignity and responsibility as the People of God. But many local parishes (in the United States) were languishing for want of both new membership and creative imagination. It became increasingly clear that the parishes that were dying on the vine were often trying desperately to survive and balance their books, but with declining numbers, finances, and focus. They came to be referred to as maintenance-oriented: focused on their own concerns and survival. By contrast, the parishes that were actually thriving often had little money but lots of ideas and zeal. They came to be referred to as missional: committed to outreach, encounter, and engagement beyond their parish boundaries and often with scarce financial resources. Parishioners did not think of themselves as missionaries in the classical sense but certainly claimed a share in the mission of Jesus. The word "missional" quickly became part of the common vocabulary, meaning "contagious": centrifugally oriented, committed to outreach and to crossing real or notional boundaries, and working with the more needy people wherever they might be. Missional people and parishes were not only surviving but thriving, despite and indeed because of the considerable personal cost.

We must both stand fast and break through, then: to remain people of principle and conviction, with clarity about the implications of Jesus' call and awareness of authentic tradition, but also willing to take risks, to cast our bread on the waters,[7] to go forward intrepidly and with faith, to help bring the promise

[7] "Cast your bread upon the water." Tashlikh is a ritual during the High Holy Days (Atonement). It takes place near a body of flowing water. After recitation

of God's reign a little closer to people overlooked, judged, or excluded by some whose earnestness and respectability can also make them myopic, fearful, or complacent.

The "resurrection event" (between Easter and Pentecost) marks the beginning of the mission of the church that continues and depends on Jesus' own mission and was ratified by the Spirit at Pentecost. So all our pastoral ministry (mini-stry or small acts of service, inconsequential to some, but undertaken in the name of Jesus and the church, however expressed), must also be missional. Pope Francis still prefers the word "missionary": as he says, we are all called by baptism to be "missionary disciples" (EG 120). But his phrase has exactly the same referent as the word "missional": it describes true disciples with the spirit of Jesus and the commitment to the other—sisters and brothers who can be encountered beyond their own comfort zone.

Whichever word we use, the meaning should convey a dynamic, centrifugal, embracing, inclusive movement focused on the margins and those who subsist there. So how will we continue to move beyond a maintenance church concerned about numbers and membership, until we become a truly missionary/missional church, concerned about people on the edges or below the horizon, absent and alienated from what they either perceive as an uncaring institution or perhaps fail even to notice? And how will a resurrection spirituality motivate and propel us to become authentic missionary/missional disciples? If a resurrection faith provides a reason for renewing our hope; it is also the reason for our hope. So how shall we identify resurrection faith?

Spoiled for Choice

The shattered followers of Jesus had faced three options: to remain, to run, or to hide. The women chose the first. Cleopas and his companion, en route to Emmaus on the very day of the

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of the Bible passage (Eccl 11:1), people cast away their sins symbolically, on the flowing waters.

resurrection, chose the second. And most of the apostles chose the second or third. Very early in the morning the women had gone to the tomb, well aware that Roman soldiers were standing guard and would likely arrest them as accomplices of Jesus. The faithful women had hardly rested, but they had planned carefully and even obtained spices prior to the Sabbath rest day. Their major concern seems to have been the heavy stone. But God had not rested either, and the stone would not be a problem. Beyond their wildest hopes they were told of Jesus' rising and were commissioned to inform the scattered apostles. The men simply did not understand and literally could not believe the women's testimony; only after Jesus appeared to Peter did they finally come to believe (Luke 24:34), with the notable exception of Thomas the absentee, who had once been brave, or foolish, enough to encourage the rest of the apostles to stay with Jesus and indeed die with him (John 11:16).

The women's courage and steadfast faith was of course vindicated before the men finally came to believe; a lesson for us all in today's church.

Meanwhile, as soon as the Sabbath was over, two others were already leaving town. They were now former disciples, convicted by their own statement: "we *had* hoped" (since, for people of faith there is no past tense in the verb "to hope"; to give up hope is to despair). Leaving Jerusalem is also the antithesis of true discipleship, which will always lead followers of Jesus *toward* Jerusalem, because they are on "the Way," and Jesus was very clear that it leads him to Jerusalem. But far from being "on the Way," these two were heading in the opposite direction. Jesus the stranger followed them, interrupted their private conversation, and asked them what they were discussing—and then called them "mindless"! Not only did they not take offense, but they listened to him attentively and then invited him to stay with them—for the very unconvincing reason that it was getting late.

From the moment he accepted their hospitality, Jesus reversed the relationship. No longer the stranger or even the guest, he became the host when *he* took the bread, *he* said the blessing, *he*

broke and shared with them in that moment of revelation. Their agenda was totally subverted, capsized like a boat in a storm. They no longer had any possible reason to remain in Emmaus and every reason to spread the news as quickly and widely as possible. So, despite having told Jesus that it was too late to go out, "they set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem." They were, once again, "on the Way."

A Call Repeated

As with the women's example, this outcome offers us an appropriate point of reflection. The conversion experienced by the former-yet-reformed disciples of Emmaus can be part of the lives of today's disciples too. As for them, so it can be for us. The Emmaus story is a gift, an invitation, and a call to "get up and return" whence we came, but with some haste and renewed determination and with a message of hope. In fact, it can be seen as a multiple call, or a call to undertake multiple tasks. Here are half a dozen.

First, an invitation to go back and reinterpret our own life story: where have I been, how did I come to this moment, and where will I go from here? Am I willing to return and revisit what still needs to be completed or healed? What have I left unfinished that still needs attention? Are there festering wounds that never closed: animosity, bitterness, resentment, rage, regret, envy or jealousy, refusal to forgive, or rejection of others' forgiveness? There is some particular thing that each of us can do. That is the Emmaus invitation: the call to rediscover "the Way" back home.

Second, a call to remember when our hearts were burning and our zeal was true passion and compassion. The Emmaus story is an account of great expectations followed by dashed hopes; those whose memories predate Vatican II remember some of the great hopes that inspired and directed our energies. But we were baptized and confirmed, marked for a whole lifetime of service and faithfulness without retirement. If our zeal has dulled and our hearts no longer burn, our service will be routine, our hope

will have atrophied, and our witness will inspire no one. God wants to replace hearts of stone with hearts of flesh, pumping blood into living bodies. But this can happen only if we truly want our dry bones to live. The Emmaus narrative can challenge us to take more time for introspection, to consider what we need to commit to—specifically rather than generically—in order to revitalize our own flagging faithfulness or depleted discipleship.

Jesus offers a third challenge or call: to recognize his own presence. At the table in Emmaus, he took the bread, blessed, broke, and shared it, as he had done a few nights earlier at the Last Supper—in summary of his entire life and in anticipation of his death—and as he does every time we stand at the altar. He is the one who offers, the one who is offered, and the very offering of his life for the world. For people of faith he can be encountered frequently, and not only at Eucharist. If, due to distraction or preoccupation, we fail to notice his presence even there, what chance is there of recognizing him in other disguises? Do we still need to ask, "When did we see you hungry or thirsty, naked or in prison, sick or a stranger?" We know the answer and it may make us squirm because the opportunities for encounter are myriad and constant.

And so to the fourth invitation: to think and act differently, to pledge ourselves to looking more intentionally for Jesus at the tables of our lives; among our com-*pan*-ions (those with whom we break and share bread, nourishment); in the quality of our hospitality to those who knock at our door, call us at unsocial times, or accost us on the street; and in the so heavily disguised stranger. Jesus' invitation is ongoing, but our RSVP is urgently required: what will we pledge to do differently tomorrow?

A fifth appeal is to discover what the stranger in disguise may have to offer us. Some people do try to welcome the stranger but can think of themselves only as givers, patrons. They cannot imagine themselves actually *being* the stranger and so are not gracious receivers, grateful recipients, or willing to be indebted to others. By deliberately taking the role of an uninformed, ignorant, needy person, Jesus empowers other downcast and dispir-

ited travelers. So he asks, "What have you been discussing on the way?" When they refer to the things that recently transpired in Jerusalem, he asks again, disingenuously, "What things?" He knows very well! But once the wayfarers find their voice, the words come flooding out as they tell their story until they finally understand what it all means.

Jesus can read each of us. But are we willing to be read, to be open, to share our deepest secrets and our public concerns? God wants to meet us in our journeying. Though often disguised as a stranger, Jesus wants to help us reinterpret our own lives and to stay with us—to accompany us—until we finally recognize him. He will never coerce, only invite; the rest is up to us. But he is often much closer than we think.

Finally, the sixth call is to return, to continue our life's journey, but with resurrection faith. Now that the disciples *know* that Jesus is alive, it makes a world of difference. We say we believe in the resurrection, that the risen Jesus—the Christ—lives, and that his Spirit is with us and among us wherever two or three gather in his name, whether explicitly articulated or simply an extension of our ongoing commitment. But would passersby recognize that it makes a world of difference to us? Jews, unlike Sadducees, believed in resurrection, but in a metaphorical and eschatological sense and as a kind of collective rapture, not for individuals. But Jesus proclaimed that eternal life is "here and now" for each person, and his own resurrection is God's public attestation that a new cosmic order has been inaugurated. The original ending of Mark's gospel was at 16:8 and deliberately intended to face future Christian disciples with the question: "What would you have done on the days after the crucifixion if you still had not heard the news of his rising?" What if you did not know for sure? Originally the gospel finished with "[the women] went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Obviously they soon had a change of heart, and when Jesus appeared, they could not stop talking about it! But Thomas still had not heard and quite clearly refused to believe. (According to John's account,

Thomas "was not with them." Where on earth was he?) So where is our resurrection faith, our conviction about the living Jesus, alive in our lives?

Don't Just Stand There; Get Back to Work!

The disciples were "staring into the sky" (Acts 1:10) when two men in white asked them why they were not getting on with their lives, assuring them that Jesus would return. Sky-gazing should not distract us from the mission. Luke's gospel concludes with Jesus' words to his disciples: "Stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). There is some tension between staying and going: the apostles had already been commissioned and sent, and that comissioning had certainly not been abrogated. They can still go and be sent, even within the city, since there will always be people at the margins and in great pastoral need. So whether we stay in the city or cross cultural and geographical boundaries, as today's disciples we are charged to seek and find the lost and forgotten, the bruised and the bloodied. Again, Pope Francis insists that we must live as the resurrection people we claim to be:

> Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. When all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. . . . [I]n the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly. Each day in our world, beauty is born anew; it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seem doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power. (EG 276)

And Richard Rohr writes, "The fact that the Risen Christ returns to embodiment tells us that salvation is first of all in this world and that embodiment is good. He meets the disciples

back at their jobs. He does not leave the world permanently. He re-enters it and reveals its radiance."[8] And so indeed must we.

[8] Quoted without reference by Daniel O'Leary, *The Tablet* (April 26, 2014): 7.

CHAPTER FOUR

"IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU"

(Mark 10:43)[1]

FROM DOMINATION TO COMMUNION[2]

The Domination Paradigm

Throughout human history and across the globe human beings have forged and imposed a way of living that can be identified by the word "domination"; its cluster of features constitutes a *domination paradigm.* Those features include the separation, polarization, and opposition of people into *us* and *them* (where me/us claims precedence over you/them); asymmetrical or nonreciprocal relationships between people; and the employment of control mechanisms such as fear, coercion, or brute force. "Might is right" is a neat slogan for those who would dominate others and is familiar to us when whenever we hear names like Nero, Attila the Hun, Genghis Khan, or, more recently, Stalin, Hitler, Pol Pot, and Idi Amin, not to mention those still alive.

The *dominator* decrees how others will behave or participate, making dominated people feel oppressed, unfree, inadequate, vulnerable, and fragile. They become identified generically, or merely by what they do (their role as servant, menial, or lackey),

[1] This, the Jerusalem Bible translation, is much closer to the Greek text than the NRSV's "It is not so among you" (Mark 10:43).

[2] This section is heavily and directly indebted to Beatrice Bruteau, *The Holy Thursday Revolution* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), *passim.*

rather than by their intrinsic human worth (their status as spouse, parent, or teacher); they are described or labeled by demeaning terms like "slave," "chattel," or "nobody." In a *domination* world, legitimate authority becomes tarnished and corroded by the use of coercive power; the human rights of the dominated are trampled, due process is abandoned, and a mood of hopelessness and helplessness settles on the dominated. The domination paradigm operates as a zero-sum contest in which there can be only a single (or group) winner and therefore a host of losers. Apart from capitulation, the only recourse for subjugated and demeaned persons seems to be rage and raw aggression. Jesus was well acquainted with this kind of domination, as were the women and men victimized, marginalized, labeled, overlooked, or condemned by the religious and civil authorities.

The Communion Paradigm

In striking contrast to domination, there is an alternative way, the Way of Jesus. This is the way of *communion*, and its cluster of features constitutes the *communion paradigm.* As lived out, it offers, for people of faith and hope, a glimpse of the realm of God and is diametrically, yet nonviolently, opposed to the way of the powers and principalities that, biblically, are whatever stands against and oppresses anyone and anything that is of and for God.

The Way of Jesus, the way of communion, cannot be imposed because communion living is an affirmation of the value of each individual and the encouragement of every person's potential for good; the fostering of reciprocal relationships of interdependence; and willingness and effort to see "the other" as one's sister or brother so that the polarized world of "us" and "them" is organically transformed to produce a new world of "we," a world of collaboration rather than unhealthy competition. This is indeed a utopian vision, counterintuitive, countercultural, and rarely achieved due to the human propensity to compete, to dominate, and to control other people. But where *communion* is practiced, persons are encouraged to develop their potential, differences can be

positively welcomed, aggression or selfishness is not provoked, and individuals can grow to become energized, eager, and hopeful in their daily lives. This way of living is not driven by confrontational competitiveness: it is no zero-sum game. The issue is the creation not of a winner/loser mentality but of mutuality, interdependence, and the development of the greatest potential of each person for the sake of the common good. This way is unequivocally inspired and sustained by faith, both personal and communal.

Jesus' Example and His Abba's Response

Jesus exemplified the communion paradigm in his personal life and public ministry, calling for reversals, whereby the leader also becomes a servant, the first also chooses the last places, rich people redistribute their resources among the poor, and nobody is considered a stranger to be neglected or humiliated. Jesus showed that legitimate status, such as teaching (where one is temporarily superior or superordinate), always needs to be counterbalanced by the free choice of roles of service like foot-washing (where one is temporarily inferior or subordinate). In other words, *magisterium* (from the root "maxi" and referring to "the big stuff") needs to alternate with *ministerium* (from the root "mini" and referring to "the little stuff," the often unnoticed but essential works of service). Jesus not only modeled this but also knew well the tendency of his own Jewish religious practice, to overload the magistry at the expense of the ministry.

Of course this was alien to people raised with a domination mentality, and it irks some members of today's church. Pope Francis has faced opposition when he tries to implement the thought and actions of Jesus. Recently, he said this: "In this Church, as in an inverted pyramid, the top is located beneath the base. Consequently, those who exercise authority are called 'ministers,' because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all."[3]

[3] Quoted in an article by Christopher Lamb, "A Shepherd Clearly Leading the Flock," *The Tablet* (December 10, 2016): 4.

The magistry of Jesus was evident in his exercise of teaching authority, both proclaiming and witnessing to his *abba.* His more subtle ministry was not only expressed in actual foot-washing but extended to all his little, easily overlooked acts of concern and compassion, patience and forbearance, listening and sometimes following the initiatives of others like Jairus (Mark 5:24; see also Matt 8:7 where Jesus was ready to follow the centurion to his servant's bedside). He offered people unconditional positive regard, sympathy, understanding, and respect. Unlike many of his peers and our own, he did not act simply on the basis of people's social or religious status, or their standing in the sight of the authorities. This has two significant consequences: it gave many people new hope, freedom to discover their own potential, and belief that God had not judged and abandoned them. But it also alienated him from many respectable people and power brokers who clung to their status, and it made him a target for those in authority who were challenged, offended, or shamed by his teachings and behavior.

The high point of his teaching and witness is the drama of Holy Thursday and his revolutionary actions at the Last Supper. A religious world governed by the domination paradigm polarized people. Rules of purity and pollution protected and endorsed some but exposed and humiliated others, and open sharing of food was as unthinkable as a free person choosing to wash the feet of slaves. But Jesus is breaking the mold, showing the example, and challenging people to erase or demolish boundaries of privilege and exclusion and choose to offer the service they expect only from inferiors. They can see what he has been doing, and he tells them pointedly, "You should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). People had already stigmatized him as one who would eat with tax collectors and sinners, and looking them straight in the eye he had said, in as many words, "Yes, indeed I do; and I shall continue to do so; and if you want to be my disciples, you must do the same, widely and often!" This, effectively, will get him killed.

His pastoral approach is also simply too demanding of his disciples, who, far from becoming apostles (commissioned) will

become renegades (deserters). Literally overnight, the call to radical inclusion, and to "do this [all of it, everything I have shown you in the time we have been together] in memory of me," will be forgotten in the panic that became the scandal of Good Friday, the day of shame, denial, and rank cowardice. In a final irony, at the end of that bitter day, Jesus would be offered bitter wine, vinegar: a stark reminder that yesterday's heady wine can quickly turn sour, leaving only the dregs.

Holy Sabbath

The disciples at the Last Supper had no idea of what would transpire after Jesus was arrested. The day after his death and hasty burial was a wasteland, a desert with no signs of life. But what was it like from God's perspective? It was the Sabbath, commemorating the day God rested, having declared the whole of creation to be "very good" (Gen 1:31). On that particular day God could indeed rest again, because the life-offering, the self-giving of Jesus was now complete and perfect. Previously Jesus had promised the gift of God—literally the "God-gift" in which the gift and God were perfectly united and combined in himself—to a woman of Samaria. "If only you knew," he says, wanting her, urging her to know the gift and who was offering it (John 4:10). Now, as Good Friday ends, Jesus the gift-giver has offered himself utterly and unconditionally to his *abba.* His *abba* will accept the gift graciously, and make a very public acknowledgment of this, through the Resurrection, so that Jesus' followers will be so reassured and so encouraged that they will at last become true disciples.

God is not only a receiver but also the giver of all good gifts (cf. Jas 1:17). So, in receiving the gift, the offering, the sacrifice of the whole life of Jesus, God must reciprocate by continuing the covenant-cycle of giving and receiving. And God's gracious acceptance and response will become gloriously manifest in the dawning of the very next day, "the first day of the week" (Luke 24:1); a day of utterly unimaginable new beginnings. The reciprocal relationship of loving trust and interdependence is itself an example of the communion paradigm in action.

From the perspective of apostles and disciples, the day after the crucifixion and death of Jesus is a day to forget, a *dies non*: time out of time, an interminable day of unknowing and bewilderment, where every fiber of trust is being tested. But for God it is a day of pure joy, profound satisfaction, a day for rest after the tumult of the previous days, a demonstration of God's renewed-but-never-abrogated commitment to the task of ongoing creation and the eternal mission of the Trinity.

For the forgetful and doubting men, God's acceptance of the whole life, and not simply the death, of Jesus is made public in the resurrection: a complete surprise! They had been paralyzed by indecision, Judas was dead, and Peter, the rock, had crumbled pitifully. But some—specifically the women in an exemplary way—had never lost faith.

Our Life, Our Church

Because we are fallible human beings there will always be tension between the call to communion and the temptation to domination. Jesus identified the domination paradigm operating among those he called hypocrites, vipers, or similar harsh and uncompromising terms. We do not need to look very far afield today—around and within—to see that his example is still very far from finding its place deep in the heart of the Christian community. There may be a danger of an excessive amount of *magisterium* at times, but there can never be too much *ministerium*, whether in the church or in society at large. Seeking the right balance between the two is another of Pope Francis's manifest contributions and will be a significant part of his legacy. As Jesus did, he consistently models the role of servant, choosing acts of ministry or service that some people would consider inconsequential and perhaps pretentious, but to the recipients is life-changing. Like Jesus, he too draws criticism from some who feel their authority is undermined or their dignity impugned thereby and who seem unable to take Jesus at his word: "Whatever you did for one of the least . . . you did to me" (Matt 25:40, NIV).

We live in a world where the domination paradigm is virtually the universal currency or language with which societies operate,

while the communion paradigm can seem only a distant ideal, far from becoming reality. How can we live in the real world, neither compromised by domination living nor deterred from believing communion living is still possible? For us, this can only be a journey in faith and hope; it cannot be achieved simply by rational planning and native intelligence. And it requires that we acknowledge the reality of the problems, chronic and acute, that the world currently faces on multiple fronts. More than that, we need to understand that, of itself, crisis is not disaster but a point of choice: serious danger indeed, but also an opportunity for redemption. Indeed, crisis can be a blessing in disguise, but we must look deep for the blessing and not be distracted or fooled by the disguise.

"Take Heart! I Have Overcome the World"[4]

We recall, then, that the Last Supper marked one of the great crisis points in salvation history. Apparent harmony turned in moments to discord, shock, betrayal, disintegration, and ultimately crucifixion—and then again, and against all expectations, to resurrection and ultimately reintegration. The disciples had ignored the signs of the impending crisis: Jesus had told them explicitly and several times that he was going—must go—to Jerusalem, to death and shame before life and glory. And he had warned them explicitly that the outcome of discipleship would be persecution before any prize giving (Mark 10:30). But, incapable of believing him, they instead turned to wrangling over who should get the seats at his right hand when he came "in glory"! (Mark 10:37, 41). When the promised crisis did come they abandoned him and fled. Crisis marks the way of Jesus, it marks the history of Christianity, and it marks the contemporary church. In today's church there is a canker of demoralization and some distrust among the clergy and much dissatisfaction and some confusion among the laity,

[4]John 16:33; NIV. The NRSV has "conquered" (rather than "overcome"), which smacks of the military solution.

and in some cases there is no love lost between clergy and laity. People who profess one faith are yet again polarized, and there are incessant skirmishes about orthodoxy and loyalty.

There is, in today's church, an identity crisis about priesthood and ministry itself. Priesthood used to be sacred, for special people "set apart," but what does it mean today? Ministry used to be of Word and Sacrament, but today people expect multiple competencies and endless energy from their aging clergy. How can the clergy be *with* and *for* the people without thereby losing their presbyteral character? How can they be authentically holy when "set among" rather than "set apart"? Such questions pose radical challenges to all the members of the Christian community.

Evidently this is only part of the story: there are numerous signs of grace and growth for anyone who looks carefully. Faith has not vanished from the world. But nevertheless, the world of today is in crisis on many fronts. The salient point is that the church has been here before and may well be here again, but God will not fail and Jesus will always have witnesses. There is nothing in today's reality that is any worse than the crisis that was looming and about to break on the night Jesus gathered his disciples for the Passover meal.

The Last Supper was many things, most of which we have hardly understood even yet. But it contains both a promise and a challenge—for us all and in our day. Only hours before the brewing crisis breaks like a thunderclap, in arrest, dereliction, degradation, and death, Jesus addresses his followers, disciples, learners—the very group whose members would betray, desert, and deny him—and calls them "friends." This is an astonishing promotion, as premature as it is unwarranted. But, far from promising them special treatment and seats at his right hand, what he demands of these friends is mutual care and concern rather than competitiveness, and the building of a new kind of fellowship, an *ekklesia*, of communion rather than a social structure of domination. For two thousand years since then, his subsequent would-be followers have struggled mightily to incarnate his dream, to see his words made flesh. Perhaps we need to be reminded of Jesus'

amazing offer of his friendship, which we can receive only if we befriend each other. If the odds seem stacked against this happening any time soon, we can recall that he forestalled our fears, saying, "Take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33): that is to say, he has transcended whatever sinfulness the powers and principalities can muster. His grace and selfless example of friendship is much more potent than our sinful selfishness.

Forming a New Ecclesial Community

A global domination paradigm and the presence of the ubiquitous principalities and powers are part of the fabric of the world in which we live. Yet we have here no abiding city and the eyes of our faith are focused on what is not yet seen. The communion way would be a realization of the realm or kingdom of God: definitely not yet fully realized but perhaps showing tiny, tender shoots of being already visible wherever true disciples struggle to live values of God's reign. And wherever signs of that reign—a "kingdom" of communion—do break through, we glimpse what might yet be, and therefore we have an opportunity to strategize. So what will we do at this time of confusion and ambiguity in the church? Pope Francis, ever a realist, warns:

> If the Christian is a restorationist, a legalist who wants everything to be clear and safe, then he will find nothing. Tradition and memory of the past must help us to have the courage *to open up new areas to God*. Those who today always look for disciplinarian solutions, those who long for an exaggerated doctrinal "security," those who stubbornly try to recover a past that no longer exists—they have a static and inward-directed view of things. In this way, faith becomes an ideology. . . . The fathers of the faith kept walking, facing difficulties. And hope does not disappoint. See, Christian hope is not a ghost [any more that Jesus on the water was a ghost] and it does not deceive! God does not mislead.[5]

[5] Interview with Pope Francis, *America* (September 30, 2013): 32.

More recently, Francis warned that critics of *The Joy of Love*, the apostolic exhortation after the Synod on the Family in 2015, fail to see how the Holy Spirit has been working since Vatican II, arguing that they see "either white or black, even if it is in the flow of life that one must discern."[6]

The theological virtue of hope is a gift of God, and we are convinced that our enterprise—as disciples of Jesus and members of the church—is of God. And so we hope. Reinhold Niebuhr, the great Lutheran theologian, said, with a touch of undue pessimism, "Nothing worth doing is completed in a lifetime; therefore we are saved by hope." As disciples, committed to the ongoing and never-finished mission of Jesus, we know well that we will not complete anything in a lifetime; but that does not absolve us from giving our whole life to the enterprise.

Therefore, we will steadfastly resist any temptation to blend into the background or become silent, and we will certainly not run away or surrender. Throughout history, crisis has always been the normal precursor to monumental change, whether to capitulation and disaster or to heroism and regeneration. The apostles first encountered it when Jesus said intolerable things and made impossible demands—and then refused to soften his language (John 6:35-66). So to whom shall *we* go, when only Jesus has the words of life for us, and when he is our only and steadfast hope? If we desire the encouragement and example of Jesus, we must be committed to incarnating, embodying, and living the communion paradigm with faith, hope, and love. The more we commit ourselves to that, the more we will discover new possibilities through a new way of living.

Living in Mutuality and Reciprocity

Living according to the communion paradigm is community living, not in the conventional sense of people living under one roof, but as the Jesus way to meet the challenging demands

[6] Ibid., 5.

of discipleship in today's world and church, while respecting and preserving the range of differences of character and gifts that constitute the *ekklesia*, the assembly of followers of Jesus. In New Testament times, *ekklesia* referred initially to a nonregulated, voluntary yet morally demanding gathering of people with a common interest, but gradually and more specifically it came to denote a faith-based, porous, and welcoming community of equals, focused on deliberation, discernment, and worship. The Catholic Church—*kath-holon* meaning "throughout the whole world," that is, not just across states and nations but in and "throughout" each individual person, man, woman, and child—the Catholic Church, scarred by the structural and frequently unacknowledged or hotly denied sins of sexism, clericalism, androcentrism, and patriarchy, must be seen to commit itself to the struggle to be liberated from the domination way. There can never be true communion living if the pervading odor of domination in the secular world seeps into the church through every fracture point. Unless we are seen to be committed to major change in the way our church is structured and operated, we are in grave danger of trying to fight an inevitably losing and disastrous battle against the prevailing wind of the Holy Spirit. It is not enough, when we feel that the wind is against us, simply to row harder, if part of our discouragement and feelings of impotence are our own fault because we are attempting to drive into the teeth of a gale that we can never overcome.

In communion living each person is not simply labeled but also treated as equal, and different ministries or functions do not divide and order people or indicate hierarchically arranged, stratified, and unjustly unequal statuses. But if one person or group believes itself to be ontologically superior to another and entitled to exercise a hierarchy of "power over" rather than of "service to," God's kingdom will never come on earth as it is in heaven as we persist in fighting against the Spirit of God. Communion, as a way to describe the gathered People of God, can happen only when individuals who have succeeded in repudiating the domination paradigm encourage others and together form a new alternative community.

This is what Jesus undertook to reimagine and re-create and what Pope Francis is committed to: a community of inclusive adoptive kinship and mutual indebtedness. This results neither in lawless *anomie* (breakdown of social norms) nor in uncontrolled anarchy (total lack of social control) but in an ethical society where people's rights are respected and their obligations rendered and fulfilled. But it requires sustained relationships that generate trust. The hallmark of these relationships is mutuality, but they do not always need to be absolutely symmetrical. A parent-child relationship is not symmetrical; a child does not contribute the exact equivalent of a parent's commitment, but each party is morally equal, and the relationship must be reciprocal. The measure here is rather "from each according to their ability, to each according to their need," which can be traced back to the community of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4:34). But mutual relationships cannot be maintained without mutual affirmation; and the criterion is from the lips of Jesus himself: "Love one another as I have loved you."

Beyond Destructive Behavior and Corrosive Language

The year 1517 marks the beginning of a destructive and yet providentially necessary period. Manifest in savage sibling rivalry during which permanent wounds were mutually inflicted and each combatant claimed to be on God's side, it left the Body of Christ in need of intensive care. Over the next half millennium, some of the wounds caused by violent reform and counter-reform movements were debrided and cauterized. A painfully slow recovery of the survivors followed, but with no love lost between them until very recently. So the church, to our shame, has been infected with the toxicity of domination, more obviously in Hollywoodized or caricatured portrayals of the medieval papacy, but still palpable within the Catholic Church, despite the infamous Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition being re-named the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. So long as clergy insist on ostentatious

dress and titles (Monsignor, my Lord, your Grace, Eminence, Holiness) and the associated deference, while other people are given demeaning tags ("non-Catholic," "just a layperson," "only a woman") or generic labels reducing them to a single function (cleaner, janitor, sacristan, secretary) while failing to dignify them with their given names, we are still in a world of domination. There is no such thing benign domination.

Mutual affirmation will always be in short supply where people are in unhealthy competition or unhealed hurts have been allowed to fester. Men in general do not exemplify the best of mutual affirmation, and clergy have little to write home about: we can be cool, mean-spirited, or slow to acknowledge each other's efforts and small successes. We can talk *about* other clergy or parishioners with words that lacerate, disfigure, and disable. There is no place for backbiting in a Christian community. Each of us must commit to repudiating slanderous or disparaging words that rapidly erode trust and to rejecting cynicism that spreads a virus of sneering contempt. We need to affirm and encourage each other, explicitly and individually, but not sycophantically.

Trust has become a huge casualty in today's church, and the failure of many leaders and teachers is a scandal touching everyone. But bishops should not carry all the blame; relations between many clergy and parishioners are marked, if not by distrust, then by greater wariness and tentativeness than before. This inhibits any forward movement and is not the way of Jesus. As lack of trust breeds more distrust, lack of cooperation or affirmation worsens the situation. Trust can be mended only if and when both parties commit to starting afresh, after contrition, mutual amnesty, or recommitment. But in our world, opponents find it easier to threaten mutual annihilation than to learn the healing art of mutual reconciliation.

Meanwhile, Pope Francis tries to work constructively with pockets of resistance or outright opposition. But if the reestablishment of trust is to occur, at least one party has to repent. That should make the penitent wiser and more understanding of the other, and perhaps chastened but never humiliated. Pope

Francis has acknowledged his own limitations and failures on several occasions. That is the basis for new relationships or the renewal of those that have been broken. So maybe the present crisis of trust will be a time of conversion helping us individually to become less judgmental or hostile, and members of a more human, loving, and repentant church, *semper reformanda*, always needing to be reformed and conformed to the image of God's children and family.

The way of communion is not yet within our grasp but also not beyond our reach. The cost is high: it demands a commitment to ongoing transformation and the systematic dismantling of structures of oppression within the church, specifically the "-isms" already identified. It requires an individual and communal effort to read the wind of the Spirit, not to oppose it, but to be in active partnership with God's Spirit, who can blow from different directions and constantly confound us by being unpredictable. Individually, we have to rethink the nature and purpose of our Christian vocation, and collectively we have to commit ourselves to building a more transparent, open, inclusive, and equal community in which each person is both welcomed and needed. This will not happen as if by magic: it requires our intentionality and commitment. We must actually *do* something different. In the words of Beatrice Bruteau: "There have to be deep transformations of perceptions, attitudes and motivations."[7] The example of Alcoholics Anonymous, already referred to (chap. 2), remains a powerful incentive for the undecided, unconvinced, or resistant. And again, Pope Francis is outstanding.

"I Have Come to Call, Not the Righteous . . ." (Luke 5:32)

Attention to Jesus' revolutionary call to communion is the church's hope in every age. It has taken Catholic leaders too long to address the scandal of refusing Eucharist to divorced and remarried people, when Jesus so blatantly practiced open

[7] Bruteau, *The Holy Thursday Revolution*, 180.

table-fellowship. Historically, people have known you must eat with two types of people if you want to live in peace: obviously, with your friends, but with your enemies too, if you hope to coexist with people who are different or with whom you disagree. Eating together creates and maintains friendship, heals wounds, and prevents hardening of attitudes that generate violence. But our church turns this upside down and says, "We can only eat together (Eucharist) when we are already friends and agree." More frightening is the implication that "they" must agree with "us" rather than everyone come to new insights and mutual conversion under the Holy Spirit's guidance. Jesus' way is through open table-fellowship and foot-washing, especially of overlooked, forgotten, judged, abused, and excluded persons.

So who do we eat with, and who would we never think of eating with? Whose feet do we wash, and who do we expect to wash our feet—people who deliver our mail or fix our cars; who drive our public transport or serve us in the stores; who make our bed and serve us in hotels or resorts; parishioners who volunteer time and talent and invisibly keep things running? On Holy Thursday Jesus gives us all an example and emphasizes that his followers must act with gracious willing service, if ever a community of equals is to be built and sustained, if ever the Body of Christ is to breathe with both lungs.

CHAPTER FIVE

"DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME"

(1 Cor 11:25)

AN URGENT AGENDA FOR EVERY CHRISTIAN

The Heart of the Matter

More than half a century ago, in 1963, Vatican II famously declared that "the [eucharistic] liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows."[1] The text then quotes from the Roman Missal that the liturgy in turn "moves the faithful . . . to be one in their commitment to [Jesus Christ]" and prays that they "hold fast in their lives to what they have grasped by their faith."[2] Evidently we are not only to be present at Sunday Eucharist, nor even simply to participate "fully" and "actively" (SC 11). We are urged, commanded, to go forth from the church with renewed conviction and an even greater hunger and thirst—for God's justice—than when we arrived. The final words, *Ite, Missa est* ("Go, the mission is 'on'!"), are intended to persuade us to imitate what we have received. The liturgy may be over but the Mission continues, urgently.

[1] Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* [SC]), 10, in *Documents of Vátican II*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

[2] Ibid.

We turn now to consider the way we live our Christian vocations—individually and as the community of faith—particularly when we are outside the church buildings, both before and after the eucharistic celebration. Is it not the case, though, that many people today do not regularly attend the eucharistic liturgy (Mass) and yet consider themselves quite serious Christians? And is it not equally true that many others, who do set great store by Mass attendance, do not seem to be passionately committed to many of the ideals, and indeed to the kinds of people, that Jesus lived and died for? It is never good to presume to read people's motives, but one might argue that many of us have perhaps overemphasized physical attendance at Mass at the expense of doing justice to the major concerns of Jesus' ministry. To many who do not share our faith tradition, it can seem that Catholics overuse the Mass, giving it pride of place on every conceivable occasion, but it would be preposterous to imagine that Jesus did the same. Certainly, the Mass as we know it was not the source of his mission and ministry. And the Last Supper alone was not what brought him to Calvary and crucifixion. So what might we need to reflect on, to learn, and to apply in our own lives?

In the prayer before the consecration in every eucharistic liturgy,[3] the celebrant recapitulates the actions and words of Jesus at the Last Supper. Yet if we look at our available sources, we discover a remarkable fact: the gospel accounts of Matthew (26:26-29) and Mark (14:22-25) do not even mention that Jesus said, "Do this in memory of me," while in John's gospel the foot-washing (13:3-15) supplants the institution of the Eucharist. The earliest account we have is from Paul's instruction to the community at Corinth (written perhaps in the early 50s). He says, "I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you" (1 Cor 11:23). Yet Paul himself was not present at the Last Supper, and he gives no specific information about his sources. He was

[3] There is one notable exception: the liturgy of Addai and Mari of the East Syrian Rite. The eucharistic prayer (*anaphora*) does not contain the words of institution.

appealing to the already established pattern of liturgical celebration, "received from the Lord," or claiming to trace its origin back to Jesus. Luke is the only evangelist to leave an account (22:17-20). That includes "do this in memory of me," but those words appear to refer only to the taking of the cup. Paul has Jesus repeating the command over both the bread and then the wine. Down through the centuries, the "this" has become tightly focused on the consecration of the elements of both bread and wine, and said only once, immediately after the consecration of the wine. Consequently, "this" seems to refer explicitly to the act of consecration and therefore an act confined exclusively to the ordained presider. But in order to appreciate the context in which Jesus was speaking and acting, we must step back and widen the focus.

The Setting of the Last Supper

It is the last night of his life, and Jesus has a captive audience for the Passover meal.[4] Within hours he will have been betrayed and filled with fearful intimations about a very different kind of cup. Far different from the cup he would use to forever fuse a memory in his disciples' minds, this would be a cup to forget. ("My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me"; Matt 26:39). Then he would be arrested, summarily tried, scourged, and led to Golgotha. So, for Jesus, there is an urgent need to ensure that his example and instructions would be remembered, acted on, and transmitted. But this is also a night to remember something else: the original Passover. It was while doing that, with all it entailed—including several cups of wine, unleavened bread, roasted lamb, and bitter herbs—that Jesus would surprise his followers by also doing something unprecedented and totally unexpected.

[4] Although the gospel accounts differ in detail, it is most likely that this gathering did indeed take place at the feast of Passover and was very similar to the Jewish *seder* meal that is celebrated to this day. If so, it is again highly likely that some of the women disciples attended. This detail is itself important when we consider the implications and applications of what Jesus was doing.

On this night, all the Jews were gathering with their kin and community to commemorate God's liberation of the people through the exodus from Egypt more than one thousand years earlier (Exod 12). This was the ceremonial celebration or memorializing of that event. But it was no nostalgic, wistful, sentimental indulgence. *Anamnesis*, the Greek word for this particular kind of remembering, has a very specific meaning. It means a vivid and active, focused and detailed calling to mind of an event in the past. This is why the book of Exodus[5] gives very detailed instructions about exactly how it is to be done. *Anamnesis* is not just about the memory: it involves the whole person, body and mind, and indeed requires the participation of the whole community. It is a corporate act of both reflection on the past and commitment to the future.

But what Jesus also needs to do on this fateful night is call for a different kind of *anamnesis* by creating and "fixing" his disciples' memories (rather as a photographer fixes an image permanently so it will not fade) so they would never forget but forever remember everything that had happened since Jesus called them. With just a few short hours left, Jesus needed to shake their memories by reminding them of what they had forgotten, failed to learn during the previous months and years, or might otherwise soon forget. The future of his little movement depended on these ambassadors.

A Thought Experiment

Remembering (*anamnesis*) is purposefully evoking the past and calling it vividly to mind. Jesus needed to recapitulate his whole life and teachings. There is great urgency at this critical moment, and they have proven obtuse and slow to learn on multiple occasions. We can imagine Jesus reminding them of many incidents. Did they remember the hungry multitude and their

[5] And see other references to subsequent Passover ceremonies (Num 9:12; Deut 16:1-8).

feeble reaction: "send the crowds away" and "we have nothing [to offer them]" (Matt 14:15, 17)? Did they recall what happened just a little later when they were cowering in the boat and thought he was a ghost? How could they not, although they would certainly have liked to forget. But what had they learned? That was the real issue. A disciple is a learner, and by that criterion they still had a lot to learn.

Did they remember going out, so full of themselves, but returning so soon and shamefaced, admitting they had been completely ineffective (Mark 9:29)? And what of Jesus' warnings when he confronted their own ambitions and competitiveness (Mark 10:28-45)? And so on; Jesus could easily raise many examples of their failure, but they needed to remember the past, to bring it to mind, to ponder, and to change. Jesus was not trying to shame them and would have them remember not only the embarrassing moments but the successes and good intentions too. Perhaps he reminded them of Peter's acclamation of faith, followed by his gaffe when he imagined that Jesus would not have to suffer (Matt 16:22); Nathaniel's spontaneous commitment (John 1:49); or Martha's extraordinary conviction about Jesus' true identity (John 11:27)—not to mention the women's fierce faithfulness.

This is Jesus' final opportunity to remind the disciples what they must *not* forget at all costs but keep in the forefront of their minds. So, after each evocation of a past incident or lesson, he would need to repeat, several times, *"Do this—and this—and this—in memory of me."* He needed not only to fix their memories but to create a trigger that would immediately release them and bring them to mind. Having fixed their memories during the Last Supper, the trigger or releasing mechanism would be the subsequent gatherings, the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup. Only if they did what he had taught them would they be keeping him constantly in mind; they would remember him in this way and never forget him. Moreover they would be remembering who they themselves were called to become; they would not return again to their shallow, ambitious, competitive ways.

So, as Jesus became increasingly animated and serious, his focus would be not only on the bread or the cup but on everything he had taught them and needed them to remember. But they would need that final mechanism or trigger to release those half-buried memories again in the future and to inspire them to action. That would be the culmination of the evening: the lessons, the meal, and the promise to be with them always. So Jesus very deliberately took bread and blessed, broke, and shared it. Then, in a similar way he took the cup of wine, blessed and shared it. And he told them that these were a sacrament, a sign, both of his abiding presence and of their responsibilities to keep him alive. "Do this," he said, "in memory of me." And for two thousand years, the actions and words of Jesus that night—compressed into the eucharistic prayer and the consecration—should be for us the releasing mechanism or initiator that precipitates more active and fervent discipleship in all of us who participate and remember exactly why we do so.

More Than a Memory

Remembering is not only about calling to mind. There are two other implications to consider. First, to remember can also be to re-member: to reassemble, reintegrate, or pull together what is in danger of falling apart. And at this very late hour Jesus needs to call his company, not only to remember by not forgetting, but to re-member by coming together if and when they should fall apart, as very soon they would. They are members of his community: the body of his followers. And although his physical body will soon be betrayed, battered, and bloodied, his corporate body—his disciples—must not disintegrate but reform and continue his mission. "This is my body," says Jesus over bread and wine, "broken, and poured out for you." "The Greek word for body, *soma*, means 'one's entire life, the whole human being.' Jesus' gift of his [whole] life has a saving meaning."[6] And Scripture

[6] Kenan Osborne, *Community, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 29.

scholar Robert Karris notes, "As Jesus has given up his entire life for others and symbolized that by sharing meals with them, so too must disciples give up their lives in service to others."[7]

So whenever, in the future, disciples gather to remember, let them take the sacrament, the sign of his presence, and let that presence become, through the bread and wine, part of them. Then he too will always be part of them and they of him. Whenever the community assembles, it will thereby become remembered: its members will remember who and what they are. It will remember Jesus its head, and each person a constitutive member, everyone different, yet all together forming the Body of Jesus the Christ.

But there is still more: remembering is not only about bringing vividly to mind and ensuring unity in diversity; there is re-membering or bonding the scattered or failing constituents of the community. To remember is also to ensure that the community is not dis-membered, mutilated, torn apart, and destroyed. In the days immediately following the Last Supper, the disciples' transition from remembering to forgetting, and from being re-membered in the Upper Room to being dis-membered by fear, cowardice, and betrayal, was as swift as it was shockingly unexpected and shameful. When they finally came to their senses, it would be because Jesus had once again appeared to them and convinced them he was alive, but also because now they finally understood—and were likely never to forget—the vital importance of remembering and re-membering.

Eucharist as the Sacrifice of Jesus

Many Christians routinely refer to the eucharistic liturgy as the Sacrifice of the Mass, a phrase with a long history with roots in ancient Semitic blood sacrifices. But Jesus has come to put an end to such apotropaic (warding off evil) or atonement (making

[7] Robert Karris, "The Gospel According to Luke," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 716.

reparation) sacrifices. References to "the unbloody Sacrifice of the Mass" were Catholics' attempts to distance Jesus from such sacrifices. But in what sense can the Eucharist be called a sacrifice? Without digging through layers of cultural and theological history, we can certainly acknowledge great confusion about the precise meaning of the sacrifice of Jesus, often identified narrowly as "the Sacrifice of the Cross."

Etymologically, the word "sacrifice" has two parts. The "sacr-" part refers to something or someone set apart, holy, or dedicated to the deity. Words like "sacristy," "consecrate," "sacred," and others contain this part. The "-fice" part is a form of the verb *facere*, meaning "to make" or "to do." Typically, these two morphemes or segments have been combined to translate "sacrifice" as "to make (something) holy," which presupposes that the previous condition was unholy or profane. But *facere* also means "to do," so sacrifice can be defined as "to do (something) holy." Since Jesus was never unholy, and everything he did was holy and dedicated to God, we can say that *the whole of Jesus' life was sacrifice* in this sense: "doing holy things." It was by no means limited to the hours between his crucifixion and death.

The antithesis of sacrifice is sacrilege: stealing or stripping away what is holy. In Matthew's gospel account, the immediate preamble to the public ministry of Jesus was the temptation in the desert: a classic attempt to persuade Jesus to repudiate sacrifice (doing holy things) and choose sacrilege (desecrating or violating the holy). Matthew gives an account of three attempts by the devil to incite Jesus to sacrilege (Matt 4:1-10). "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil," says the text, explicitly identifying the Holy Spirit as the initiator of this encounter. The Spirit who leads him into the desert will lead him out again, vindicated. To turn stones into bread would be a violation of God's power; to throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple would be to tempt God to intervene, an unholy act of presumption; and to bow the knee before the devil would be an act of gross impiety and idolatry, a sacrilege. Each of these represents the repudiation and indeed the antithesis of holy

living. Instead, it is the devil himself whom Jesus repudiates, and he remains steadfast in his commitment to "doing holy things." The narrative concludes: "The devil left him, and suddenly the angels [messengers of the Holy Spirit of God] came and waited on him" (Matt 4:11). Jesus now leaves the desert and travels to Galilee to undertake his mission. Having repudiated the devil's unholy, sacrilegious machinations, everything Jesus does will be pure sacrifice: doing holy things as a way of life.

As the Letter to the Hebrews says, "[Jesus] has no need to offer sacrifices day after day . . . ; this he did once for all, when he offered himself" (Heb 7:27). So what is "the sacrifice of Jesus"? Simply, his offering of his whole life to God on our behalf—but summarized, concentrated, and distilled in the action that takes him from the room of the Last Supper to the tomb of his rising. Jesus not only died for us; he lived for us intensely, passionately, and compassionately. He literally gave his life—his entire life—for us. Therefore, in order to "do this," to keep his memory and our own hopes alive, we too must repudiate the daily temptations to do unholy things and imitate the integrity of Jesus by offering our own lives, lived fully and for others. We are called to avoid what is unholy and to do holy things, whether significant or relatively inconsequential. We do this by lives of sacrifice built on the model Jesus gave us.

Eucharist as Thanksgiving: Giving Thanks, Exchange of Gifts

The Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, Mass, Eucharist: these are some of the ways Christians describe the central act of worship that is rooted in the whole life of Jesus. The word "eucharist" tells us something else we need to remember. It means giving thanks, thanks-giving. It is important to acknowledge—as the revised translation of the prayers during the preparation of the gifts reminds us—that we have nothing of our own and that everything we have to give we have first received: "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness *we have received the*

bread/wine we offer you: fruit of the earth/vine and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life/our spiritual drink."

Some of the offertory prayers, and those after Communion, embellish this theme, speaking of the "admirable exchange" by which God gifts us with God's own divinity, not making us divine beings, but "divinizing" us, enhancing or restoring us to our full potential. This is why Jesus himself became human, so that we might become raised up. As we pray, "Almighty Father, may the body and blood of your Son give us a share in his life, for he is Lord forever and ever, Amen."[8] This restoration, humanizing, or "divinizing" (*theosis*) is much more developed by Orthodox theologians, some of whom suggest that even without the Fall and original sin, Jesus would still have become incarnate in order to forge ever-closer bonds or relationships of exchange between God and humanity.

The essence of systems of exchange that constitute one of the basic building blocks of human society is that they employ various forms of reciprocity. Nobody can manage entirely alone, for we are social creatures, made to live with other social creatures. Gift exchange, such as it has evolved and become streamlined and institutionalized across human societies, is built on three obligations: to give, to receive, and to return. Any society requires both givers and receivers. Therefore, not only are people required to give (that is, to proffer or to transact), but there must be someone to receive what is offered in order to create a (minimal) relationship. But to sustain a relationship, one that moves beyond simple contract (*do ut des*: I give so that you give; our relationship is now concluded to the satisfaction of both parties), must people find ways to commit themselves not only to be either givers or receivers but to be both and to repeat the actions over time, which means that the one who receives must reciprocate and the initial donor—having received from the recipient—must at some point return yet another offering. This is different from a simple transaction of give/receive or receive/repay, for the objective is not

[8] Prayer after Communion, Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

simply to repay (which would conclude the recipient's responsibility) but to forge a continuing relationship.

Since we have received from God, we have an obligation to give to God as a sign of our gratitude and commitment to maintaining the relationship. But "what repayment can I make to God?" as a common translation of Psalm 116:12 has it. And the psalmist answers his own question by acknowledging that we simply cannot *repay* God, as would be the case when closing a contract. God does not contract with us. God is a God of covenant: reciprocal, enduring relationship. The psalmist concludes that, by way of a return gift, a token of his continuing commitment, he will "lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD" and that he will pay his vows, keep his promises to God, and "offer a thanksgiving sacrifice" (v. 17). Here we have an articulation of some of the elements that constitute *eucharist*: sacrifice and thanksgiving as ongoing acts and signs of a covenantal relationship.

But there is one more component to such a relationship. Just as we humans have an obligation to give, to receive, and to return (not simply to repay and be acquitted of future obligations), so does God. Because the God of covenant is a God of integrity, God *must* undertake to honor certain obligations to humanity. God (the giver of all good gifts) must not only give, and indeed receive our thanksgiving ("thanks-gift"), but also continue to give and receive and return, just as we must. Our participation in the Eucharist is our participation in this mutual relationship, in which we give (what God has already given us); we receive what God offers us (the example, the life, and the abiding *real presence* of Jesus); and we continue, week after week and year after year, to be sustained in this relationship by heeding the words of Jesus: "Do *this* in memory of me." Saint Paul puts it beautifully. When explaining his motivations to the community at Corinth, he says: "Yes, everything [I am doing] is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God" (2 Cor 4:15). As with Paul, so with us: we should strive to do good by continuing the mission of Jesus, thereby evoking

people's gratitude—not to us, "unworthy servants"—but to God who, inspired us and gave us all we have to give in the first place.

From Eucharist to Mission

Since Jesus' action over the bread and wine will subsequently trigger the disciples' memories and provoke their continuing responses, his intention was surely more than to create a liturgical ritual that would come to be known as the Eucharist? Jesus needed to ensure that his disciples not only remember but keep alive for future generations *his whole life*. If Jesus is opening his arms to embrace his entire ministry, then the eucharistic ritual with its narrower focus on the bread and wine, while intrinsically important, acts both as a reminder and as a stimulus for future generations, called to emulate Jesus by doing "this"—*all of it*—to the best of their ability. "This" would include everything that would flow into every subsequent liturgical assembly, as well as the fruits of lives dedicated to the living memory of Jesus, as the believers returned to their daily routines to live out the gospel and the mission of Jesus.

We have continued to celebrate the formal ritual and sacrament of Eucharist, down through the centuries since the Last Supper. But have we continued to do "this"—to keep the memory of Jesus alive in everything we do? Would Jesus recognize us only by our Mass attendance, or is something missing until the Eucharist (capital *E*) is complemented and completed with the eucharist (small *e*) of our daily faithfulness to his mission?[9]

If the Eucharist is (to return to our opening reference) "the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed" and "the source from which all its power flows" (SC 10), this surely implies that it is only complete when "the activity of the church" leads the people of God to the liturgy, and the liturgy in turn leads

[9] For an elaboration of this, see Anthony J. Gittins, "Eucharist in (Extra) Ordinary Time," in *Called to Be Sent: Co-Missioned as Disciples Today* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2008), 53–71.

the people of God to the continuing mission—and to continuing the mission—of Jesus. What leads us to and flows from the Eucharist is also part of the whole. Like seed scattered in the hills and valleys, then gathered to make the eucharistic bread, so we, scattered in towns and villages, are gathered to celebrate Eucharist. *Ite, missa est!* sends us forth to scatter again, committed to the mission of Jesus and the church, until we again gather to repeat the cycle. We who are scattered must gather, and we who gather must scatter; a gathered people who fail to scatter in mission are no better than a scattered people who fail to gather again for Eucharist.

Who precisely is involved in all this? Within living memory, people would speak of "Father's Mass," and priests would often celebrate alone. But the Eucharist is not "father's," and every celebration requires the "full and active participation" of the community of the faithful, the People of God (SC 11). We are called to be a eucharistic people, not a stratified community of clergy and laity or male and female.

So how, and where, shall we become a eucharistic people? By doing, to the best of our respective abilities, what Jesus did and bade us to "do *this*, in memory of me." We can scour the New Testament for examples of what Jesus did, or we can integrate it all under four simple headings: encounter, table-fellowship, foot-washing, and boundary crossing. Pope Francis calls us all, whoever we may be, to become "missionary disciples," [10] emphasizes a ministry of "encounter," [11] has undertaken foot-washing in a literal and figurative sense for years, and insists on boundary crossing and outreach to the margins.[12] We will look more closely at this in a later chapter.

Summary and Scandal

The Mass is not the repetition of unique Calvary event but the sacrament of his sacrifice: the visible sign pointing to his

[10] The Joy of the Gospel (*Evangelii Gaudium* [EG]), pars. 24–25, 28, 33, 35, 40, 119–21.

[11] EG 3, 8, 9.

[12] EG 20, 30, 48.

whole life and bringing it vividly to the minds of the gathered community. In our participation, we are remembering who Jesus is for us, and who we are called to become, and we are thereby "re-membered," united as a single community of faith and rededicated to the mission of Jesus as we leave the gathering, "sent" to live our faith. The liturgical ritual that calls us to the table—the Mass—can never exhaust the total meaning of Eucharist. Tragically, Christians have fought intellectual and physical battles over the meaning of the "real presence" of Jesus in the Eucharist. Clarification is always good to seek. But the Eucharist is a mystery, and mysteries cannot simply be unraveled and revealed by human minds. Such fighting has also distracted us from becoming a true eucharistic community. As Kenan Osborne reminds us, "A one-sided focus on the physical body and blood of Jesus restricts the New Testament meaning of Eucharist." [13] Moreover, Jesus is *really*, though not *physically*, present in the Eucharist. He is present *sacramentally*[14] and not, as some people still imagine, the victim of a cannibalistic rite.

A true sacrament is a sign, but it must be an effective sign by demonstrating that what it proclaims is true. A signpost should point in the right direction, contain accurate information, and be legible. During World War II when Germany seemed likely to invade Great Britain, many signposts were deliberately changed: some now pointed in the wrong direction, others gave incorrect distances, and some were pulled down or had their information erased. A sign that—deliberately or not—points in the wrong direction, contains incorrect information, or is illegible is not a true or effective sign. As members of the Body of Christ, we must become effective signs for public information: people who "do this" in memory of Jesus. If we leave the church but fail to live our faith, we become ineffective signs. A church that proclaims

[13] Osborne, *Community, Eucharist, and Memory*, 29.

[14] For one of the best and clearest expositions of sacramental, real presence, see Nathan Mitchell, *Real Presence: The Work of Eucharist* (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publication, 1998), 108–14.

God's mercy and love for all yet fails to include and welcome at one table all who share one baptism, one faith, and one Lord is not yet the true, clear, and authentic sign that Jesus wanted to leave for people to see. He gave us an unambiguous example, eating with tax collectors and sinners and practicing inclusive table-fellowship. That was a scandal, and it contributed to his death. Our current eucharistic practice is also a scandal, but for the opposite reason: it is not yet a true *remembering*, either of Jesus' example or of the divided Christian community.

Half a millennium after the reformations that produced the tragic fragmentation of the Christian community, we are still not the kind of eucharistic community Jesus was trying to create. There has been a great deal of *rapprochement* between denominations and major agreements and collaboration. But there is still much work to be done. These reflections might provide even more food for thought and make us even hungrier and thirstier for God's justice. But we still have a long way to go before we can claim to be faithful to Jesus' command, "Do *this* in memory of me": all of it.

PART 2

MARGINS, MISSION, AND DIVERSITY

CHAPTER SIX

"GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT YOURSELVES"

(Mark 6:37)

CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR MARGINAL MINISTRY

Overlapping Circles

In 2012, the World Council of Churches produced a wonderfully suggestive and challenging mission statement[1] containing deep reflections on margins, mission, and diversity. We might visualize three overlapping circles like three of the five iconic Olympic rings, each containing one of these topics: margins, mission, and diversity. None of the three circles stands alone; each touches the other two, and together they form an image more interesting and evocative than one simple shape can do. Because each circle includes two areas of overlap with the others and a central area not shared with either, I will use that structure here and try to make specific points about each of the three topics, but also I will also attempt—by jumping back and forth—to identify the necessary interrelationship between them.

[1] "Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes," September 5, 2012. To download the PDF of this document, see https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes. Further references will be to TTL.

Boundaries, Definitions, and Margins

These three common words form a natural family with overlapping meanings. Though they are sometimes used synonymously, there are significant distinctions to be made. And although this book is theological and pastoral rather than etymological in nature, a little semantics might help sharpen our theological focus.

A *boundary* is a marker or dividing line serving primarily to separate but also thereby to point to the proximity or connection between territories or people. Some boundaries are porous while others are impermeable, some hardly noticeable and others patrolled and stoutly defended. A *definition* is itself a form of boundary creation that identifies the limits, limitations, or edges that clearly exclude what, or who, is not clearly included. A *margin* is also an edge but one that draws immediate attention to a contrasting center against which the margin is polarized and by reference to which it is itself defined.

The word "marginal" is implicitly hegemonic or dominating because it adopts the perspective of (the person at) the center. It refers to something or someone judged—from the central position—to be unimportant, of minimal significance, and not included in the main part of something else. Those people designated marginal are, by definition, incompletely assimilated into the mainstream, at the lower limits of someone else's standards of acceptability, and liminal. But how they become or remain marginal is also highly significant. The words "margins" and "marginality" are evidently related but also ambiguous and polysemic, elusive and sometimes subtly shape-shifting. They can evoke different sentiments and responses in different individuals at different times and are by no means user-friendly to large numbers of people. But it is also helpful to bear in mind that what is problematic or offensive to some can be life-giving and wholesome, even attractive, to others. Jesus himself, our teacher and model, deliberately adopted a marginal lifestyle and lived for those people who subsisted at the margins of religious or civil society.

Because the verb "to marginalize," and the verbal adjective "marginalized" (as in *a marginalized* person) can carry several different connotations, we need to distinguish *imposed* marginality from *chosen* marginality, then *active* from *passive* marginality, and, third, make a brief reference to *liminality*. But the phrase "comfortably marginal" would be a near oxymoron. So first: some further elucidation of terminology and usage, lest we create more confusion than clarity.

Imposed and Chosen Marginality

Marginality is the condition of being perceived as situated at a border or edge, far from the center of power, influence, orthodoxy, or lifestyle. The word is often used to label certain people. By whatever social or religious agencies, such people are forced into a situation in which they are perceived, certainly by those at the centers, and sometimes even by themselves, as irrelevant, inferior, and often culpable. Most people however, would neither choose nor take kindly to the appellation "marginal."

But some do; there *are* people who, for various reasons, actually choose to leave the centers of power and seek an "eccentric" or marginal status. Such are some dedicated individuals who leave their home or center in order to seek the margins and the people who live there. Such people—whether prince or pauper, whether living in a fine home or homeless and destitute, whether incarcerated and hopeless—though identified as marginal by others, are nevertheless, in a manner of speaking, at home, such as it may be. They may not be comfortable or in their preferred place, but they are in familiar surroundings and they know how to negotiate their daily activities. Some may be of no fixed abode yet not immediately anticipating an alternative lifestyle. But insofar as some people who actually choose marginality do so in dedication to "the other," they become outsiders in the new social world they enter: they are out of place, in relatively unfamiliar surroundings, and they do need assistance simply to negotiate the demands of day-to-day living. They may be neither royalty nor prisoners nor homeless people. Yet

they can, with the gradual development of appropriate mutuality and the acquiescence or assistance of the insiders, become accepted as outsiders who actively participate in their new environment and render some service of assistance, rather than outsiders who remain aloof and uninvolved or even interfere.

People who are marginal outsiders by choice would therefore be outsider-participants rather than outsider-nonparticipants: a crucial distinction that the Jews made clear. The Hebrew language distinguishes the former (*gēr*: "resident alien") from the latter (*nōkri*: "sojourner"). Like someone with a green card in the United States, the resident alien has some rights and duties but is not entitled to vote or serve on a jury. The sojourner, by contrast, would be like someone with a tourist visa with specific conditions attached, few rights, and a specified departure date.

Sociologically, the outsider-participant is the *stranger*, a word that describes very well the chosen status of Jesus, who, "though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be exploited, but emptied himself" (Phil 2:6-7). Jesus chose active marginality, and in the striking phrase of biblical scholar John Meier, he became a "marginal Jew."[2] Anyone who desires to follow the example of Jesus as a disciple, and intentionally takes up the daily cross in order to walk the Way of the Teacher, must thereby choose marginality. Yet relatively few seem to take this sociological identity (stranger/outsider-participant) seriously to heart as the major driving force of their ministerial and missionary lives, partly, one imagines, because they have not thought it through. But it is critically important for us to mark the distinction between imposed and chosen marginality.

Active and Passive Marginality

Some people choose a marginal status, temporarily or even as a lifestyle. But others have little choice: they are marginalized by

[2] John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 4 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1991–2009).

circumstance or by others, and their marginality is an imposition. We therefore distinguish active and passive marginality. Active marginality may take the form of an initiative or a response. As an initiative it is essentially the same as chosen marginality. But some people, initially marginalized against their will, manage to transform this situation into a mark or symbol of new significance. One thinks of people who are gay or lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered. By asserting their legitimate identity, they may gain for the designation "LGBT" wider currency and respect, thus contesting and removing some social stigma. More widely, active marginality describes what any countercultural Christian is committed to as a path to discipleship.

Classically, through Georg Simmel a century ago, and Everett Stonequist thirty years later, the social sciences described the marginal person as one living in two societies but as a member of neither, "poised in psychological uncertainty."[3] But there is much more to marginality than this. In his influential 1995 book on marginality, Korean American pastoral theologian Jung Young Lee discusses its positive and negative aspects, offering a helpful scheme or scale. He distinguishes passive or even pathological marginality from other, more productive forms. Because "to be in-between two worlds means to be fully in neither,"[4] one must strive for more than becoming a non-being living in "existential nothingness."[5] There are, fortunately, several possibilities. One may learn to live "in-both" by affirming both one's roots and one's branches, one's original home and one's current domicile. But it is also possible to live "in-beyond"—which describes the perspective of the Letter to the Hebrews (13:14): "We have here no abiding city, but seek one which is to come"—by keeping our focus on our ultimate destination and aspiration. Lee says that

[3] Everett Stonequist, *The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict (*New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), 8.

[4] Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 45.

[5] Ibid.

being in-between and in-both "embodies a state of being in both of [these] without either being blended. This new *marginal person* has the ability to be continuously creative."[6] This is a helpful insight as we explore some possibilities and challenges posed by margins, marginality, and marginalization.

Economist and social justice theorist Amartya Sen speaks of active and passive "social exclusion."[7] The former happens when immigrants or refugees are "not given a usable political status," while passive exclusion happens "when there is no deliberate attempt to exclude"[8] but poverty and unemployment create conditions that produce such exclusion. This can be just as harmful, as when the government or church has a responsibility to examine the effects—direct and indirect—of its policies or procedures yet fails to do so. But, whether Christians create or perpetuate the marginalization of people actively or passively is less important than the fact that to contribute to either form of marginalization is immoral, reprehensible, and completely contrary to the spirit of the mission of Jesus. In short, social exclusion describes any process that causes people to be relegated to the social margins by depriving them—individually or collectively—of their basic human rights through discrimination on whatever grounds.

Positive and Negative Marginality (Liminality)

One form of marginality is *liminality*. From the Latin for "threshold" or "boundary," it describes a state of in-betweenness in a rite of passage as one is moved from a former social status to a new one. During the transitional or liminal stage,[9] an initiate in the process of changing social status experiences a lack

[6] Ibid., 62.

[7] Amartya Sen, "Social Exclusion Concept, Application, and Scrutiny," *Social Development Papers*, 1. Office of Environment and Social Development, Asian Development Bank, Manila, 2000.

[8] Ibid., 14–15.

[9] The three stages are *preliminal* (preliminary), *liminal*, and *post-liminal* (incorporation).

of social identity, confusion, and total reliance on others. It is a period of both danger and promise. The intended outcome is the re-incorporation of individuals as a group into society, but with a new, enhanced social identity. As a transitional stage in a ritual, liminality is positive if it leads initiands to the intended outcome but negative if it fails to do so, leaving an individual in an ongoing state of status-confusion, anguish, and often enduring fear. The theories of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner,[10] who built up the ethnography of liminality, are not beyond lively critique, but they have afforded us very useful language and concepts, not least for those on the pilgrimage to true discipleship.

Marginality and liminality designate transitional states or betwixt-and-between-ness. Positively, the move should to be toward life, by working through a death-like struggle to a transformation of status and the beginning of new life—such as experienced in the Rites of Christian Initiation (RCIA). These move a person, via submersion and symbolic death-by-drowning, to emergence into a new life in Christ. Traditional initiation rites, the original focus of Victor Turner's studies, have a similar function. But if liminality emphasizes the positive, marginalization commonly has negative connotations, signifying a gradual or dramatic fall from grace, a passage from life to social death. Yet while acknowledging the dreadful effects of imposed marginalization, it is important theologically to identify the benefits of positive marginalization, both on the person who chooses it and on its beneficiaries.

Margins: Problems and Possibilities

Margins and boundaries serve a triple function: to keep in, to keep out, and to be contact points, bridges, or meeting places. To consider not only problems but real pastoral possibilities, we recall that everyone is located in a particular place or center,

[10] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge, [1908] 1977); Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).

defined in relation to an edge, boundary, or margin. Each of us is a microcosm within a macrocosm, and we live in a series of microcosms nesting within their respective macrocosms. Our body is a microcosm, a little world, bounded visibly by our skin and invisibly by our social space. This microcosm encapsulates something autonomous and sacred: our personal physical integrity. But it is not entirely independent. It exists in relation to a bigger world beyond the boundaries of the self where others exist.

Each of us constitutes an individual microcosm within our surroundings. But if we were to walk around blindly we would soon bump into something or someone, or perhaps fall. We exist within a web of boundaries and margins: personal boundaries, visible and invisible, between each person; and structural boundaries, such as walls and doors, between us and the wider world. If they are negotiated appropriately, we can hope to live with dignity and harmony. Then we become responsible for maintaining our personal integrity and encountering others—or "the other"—in a mutually respectful manner. Then, boundaries or margins, personal and interpersonal, serve a positive function of protecting human dignity and enabling wholesome interaction. But whenever something or someone inhibits the appropriate negotiation of personal and social boundaries or margins, people's lives are endangered and their human dignity impugned. Then, either people exploit others' physical integrity by failing to respect mutual boundaries or they constrain or restrain others within spatial or territorial boundaries, as in a prison or custodial area. Then, boundaries can become the locus of rank injustice and oppression.

"Mission has been understood as a movement taking place from the centre to the periphery, and from the privileged to the marginalized" (TTL 6).[11] This common understanding located the missionary, the "sent one," at the center, and "the other" or the recipients of the message as marginal. But TTL does not pursue a highly significant point: one who moves from the center

[11] These references are to the text identified in footnote 1.

to the margin is thereby now located at, or on, the margin itself. Instead, the text implies a unidirectional movement, as a result of which the marginal, or marginalized, person (not the same thing) becomes assimilated to a new center. Had the point been developed, there might have been a consideration of the fact that the person from the center now becomes marginal, in two possible ways: first, by contagion or stigma, simply by being located among the people designated marginal (as in "He eats with tax collectors and sinners"); and second, by now being marginal relative to the people who, after all, occupy the center of their own world, which the missionary disciple patently does not.

The document continues: "Now people at the margins are claiming their key role as agents of mission," noting that "there is a shift in the mission concept, from 'mission *to* the margins' to 'mission *from* the margins' " (TTL 6). This theme is then pursued and developed in part 2 of the document and bears further reflection.

First, we must acknowledge that we do not simply minister "at the margins" or "to the marginalized." Such phrases as "the marginalized" or "the privileged" reduce people to a category and can depersonalize and even dehumanize them, as do phrases like "the homeless," "the poor," or "prostitutes." We cannot talk generically, because there are no generic people, only particular women, men, and children. Our language needs to become sensitized to human persons as individual agents. "Homeless woman," "unemployed man," or "marginalized people" are more appropriate designations. After all, ministry is, first and last, communication and relationship with real people, some of whom happen to be marginalized and live, or subsist, at the margins.

Second, according to this categorization, we ourselves are not typical of such people—though each of us here can probably identify some situations in which we are, or feel, marginalized, relative to church or society. Therefore, the marginal ministry we undertake implies and entails outreach across, or at, whatever margins or boundaries separate or insulate us from those who are marginalized. But some mutuality is the hallmark of

all authentic ministry. TTL perhaps fails to acknowledge this adequately. It contrasts "mission to the margins" with "mission from the margins," as a contemporary way of imagining the call to missionary discipleship.

Perhaps this pendulum shift—from "mission to" to "mission from"—is more dramatic than it need be. Is it too dialectical to be of the greatest practical and pastoral value? A more analogical[12] or balanced relationship between "mission to" and "mission from" may be more realistic and might better reflect the mission of Jesus. To add "mission with" or "mission for" would highlight the mutuality required. A very telling aspect of the mission of Jesus is that it was not simply *to* but *for* and indeed *with* the recipients of the Good News. Discipleship is essentially collaboration with Jesus and responsibility for proclaiming, witnessing, and becoming the Good News. A radical shift from "mission to" to "mission from" might make us overlook the very locus of all missional encounters: at the margins themselves where I and Thou, Us and Them, can meet. We need to focus on those very margins, on marginal and marginalized people, and on the dynamics of the encounters taking place there, as people from both sides converge.

Unquestionably, those of us who have spoken too much and too loudly and listened too little and too late need to be converted and hear the voices from the margins, especially the cries of the poor. But to move from speech to silence is not to facilitate conversation. Only when both parties listen attentively and speak sequentially is there conversation and dialogue. The World Council document says it well: "Participation in God's mission follows the way of Jesus . . . characterized by mutuality, reciprocity, and interdependence" (TTL 45). This avoids the polarization or opposition between a variety of approaches to mission, as found, for example, in TTL 41, which seems to oppose marginalized people "as recipients" *rather than* "active agents of missionary activity."

[12] As in David Tracy's *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

Each person should strive to be *both* a giver and receiver. If the world were composed only of givers, there would be nobody to receive, and vice versa. But in a world of interdependence, we must become both.

Jesus: Marginal by Choice and Example

People marginalized by others are victimized and treated sinfully. But some are not forced into marginalization, and Jesus himself exemplifies one who chooses marginality precisely as a way of living his mission and as an example to those who presume to follow his missionary example. It is curious and deeply saddening that, having read the words of Jesus, "I was a stranger" (Matt 25:35), we have concluded they mean only that we should in turn embrace and show hospitality to the stranger. But that is not the only implication. Applying those other words of Jesus at the Last Supper, "As I have done, so you must do" (John 13:14), we should understand that Jesus is asking us to be like him in *actually embracing* the role and status of a stranger ourselves. To show hospitality is to identify *the other* as stranger and oneself as host—a position of superiority and control. But the stranger, by definition, is in an inferior position and not in control, which is perhaps why we have been considerably quicker to opt for the role of host than to embrace the role of stranger.

As noted, the Letter to the Philippians reminds us that Jesus "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave . . . to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Phil 2:7-8). This is precisely to embrace the role and status of a stranger, the palpably marginal person! Disciples in mission have two tasks, therefore: first, to acknowledge that we have a choice but must exercise that choice by choosing to become marginal insofar as possible; and second, to focus on the margins themselves as places of exploitation, committing ourselves to an actively marginal ministry with the people to be found there. The whole life of Jesus was poured out in marginal ministry or ministry at the margins. Born outside the city and raised in marginal circumstances—of poor, migrant,

and later refugee parents—he lived continuously in such circumstances "with no place to lay his head" (Matt 8:20) and at odds with authorities. And he died outside the city, having been branded variously as out of his mind, a blasphemer, Beelzebub, and a criminal. But at every step, Jesus made choices in favor of the margins and the women and men caught there because of economic, political, or religious circumstances. This was his preferential option for the poor. He warned his disciples explicitly that to follow him would lead them to commit themselves to, for, and with people considered the dregs of society: people living either on society's margins and even marked, as many were, by various forms of social death. The Twelve, slow learners looking for privilege and seats on his right and left were warned of the persecutions to come (Mark 10:30), and they were told that what he asked was "impossible" for them but not for God's grace (Mark 10:27). As their descendants, we have the same instructions as they received: to reach out to the margins and the people caught there.

The Missionary Potential of Actively Marginal People

The World Council document makes a telling point: "Living on the margins however, can provide its own lessons. People on the margins have agency, and can often see what, from the centre, is out of view" (TTL 38). But "people on the margins" cannot be restricted to those marginalized by social or religious forces; they also include people—like Jesus and ourselves—who choose some form of marginal living as a faith commitment. In differing degrees, such people become sociological strangers, the word Jesus applies to himself. Assuming they remain with the people they serve over a considerable period of time and with due commitment to their well-being, they can make a unique contribution in half a dozen significant ways:[13] from the sharing of their respective lives to the pooling of their resources; from a commit-

[13] Anthony J. Gittins, *Ministry at the Margins: Strategy and Spirituality for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 121–60.

ment of solidarity and moral support to a mutual opening up of microcosms; and from mediating factional hostilities to forging real fraternal interdependence.[14] Engagement between people marginalized by circumstance and by choice can be life-saving, literally and figuratively, but specifically as participant-outsiders in communities in which they cannot and need not become fully assimilated or incorporated. As a missional commitment, this creates a new space where, in encountering the other, we encounter a hitherto unknown and unrecognized face of God.

An ever-present danger is that we lose our bearings as we struggle at and with margins and marginalized people. Then we would become negatively or pathologically liminal, leaving us "in-between" worlds, in Jung Young Lee's phrase. But those truly committed to Jesus' mission and the people struggling at the margins can learn to live integrated and healthy lives, as Lee says, "in-both" worlds. As outsider-participants we cannot be fully at home with those in whose home we find ourselves—any more than we can ever become fully at home even when we return to the home we left. People who are intentionally marginal for the realm of God will know that indeed we have here no abiding city: theologically, they live in-beyond, says Lee.

Bringing It Close to Home

No Christian can fail to be keenly aware and ashamed (by contact or implication) of the scandal of sexual abuse perpetrated on minors by ostensibly trustworthy adults. In the context of margins and marginality, it is worth reflecting on this subject, the long-term consequences of which will fester unless they are addressed and healed. This abuse is significantly related to control or dominance and the violent breaching of personal boundaries and bodily margins. Another parallel is found in attitudes to refugees and migrants who reach or seek safety beyond the margins

[14] Ibid., 135–41.

of their own territory and at the borders of another nation only to find closed borders and rampant xenophobia.

Paralyzing fearfulness, panic-driven immobility, or capitulating retreat are not legitimate pastoral options, any more than homophobia or xenophobia. So how to face the future remains a constant challenge. Legitimate answers can be found only in specific contexts: generic bromides are no substitute for compassion that is incarnated in each of us and directed at real people.

Every person should learn—though many fail—to identify and respect a range of margins: social, personal, interpersonal, religious or national, and so on. Self-abuse, however understood, bespeaks a breakdown of *self*-respect, just as abuse of others, whether sexually, physically or by neglect, is a desecration of the physical or moral integrity of "the other." Likewise, the abuse of property, space, earth, air, fire, or water is a social sin of structural proportions. Tragically, self-respect, mutual respect, and respect for nature are at a premium in many human communities and cultures today, as Pope Francis eloquently and urgently reminds us.[15]

Respect for boundaries or margins, however, is only part of our responsibility to each other. It must be balanced with committed outreach, engagement, and human contact. People must discover new ways to reach out, to encounter, to engage at their respective boundaries,[16] in order to establish authentic human connections of appropriate intimacy. Then they can build amicable and loving relationships and create new communities, lest human society break down and people become isolated, antisocial, and increasingly hostile. True intimacy is intrinsic to true humanness; and margins are precisely the points of contact between individual persons.

We Christians must understand how margins operate and then how and under what circumstances to try to bridge or cross them, to connect with whomever is just on the other side. Those without such finesse will fail to honor their personal integrity

[15] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*̀ (*On Care for our Common Home*), 2015.
[16] EG 20, 30, 186–98.

or to respect that of others. Then people overstep appropriate margins, causing grave harm, or they become so fearful of encounters that they withdraw and cower within the boundaries of their own little world. Our challenge today is first to respect and then appropriately to cross or erase whatever boundaries or margins separate or segregate people who need each other. It is a huge challenge and it is vitally necessary that we meet it as an expression of our faith, compassion, and solidarity.

Conclusion

The institutional Church in recent years has been thoroughly confused and compromised over boundary issues. People in positions of trust have violated others, and some still fail to understand the scandal, the sin, and the cost. Victims—by no means all of them "survivors"—have been betrayed and cheated. Appropriate sanctions have not been imposed, nor has adequate repentance been shown. Secretiveness and cover-ups have protected the guilty. A corrupt system operated by some authorities and hierarchy who closed ranks and refused to be accountable, hiding within the boundaries of clerical privilege, has revictimized already damaged victims.

When this particular volcano erupted, chaos ensued, producing systemic breakdown of communication and trust and deep anger with the realization of how widespread was the breaching of personal boundaries. The outraged reaction on the part of the People of God, including many clergy, is producing a quite unchristian stalemate between some bishops and clergy, on the one hand, and children and parents, on the other. Meanwhile, some seminarians and clergy seem paralyzed or appear to be running away, hiding, or determined never again to reach out, to encounter, to negotiate interpersonal margins in a loving and respectful way—all of which is a direct threat to the essential Christian ministry, which is always a call to the edges, the interstices that separate and unite us, in order to heal rather than hurt, to connect rather that confront.

We are not monads but dyads, triads, and communities. We need each other. Therefore we must urgently work toward establishment or rebuilding trust and credibility. Public agents, believers, and ministers in our various ways, we must be seen to be committed to integrated and integral ministry, which can be realized only when the inner and the outer aspects of life, the pastoral and the missional, the microcosmic and macrocosmic, are appropriately related; and this always entails work on personal and interpersonal margins.

Trust can be established only through face-to-face encounters, which require that people meet at their respective bodily or territorial boundaries where they can reach out, make contact, and embrace, tentatively at first, but wholesomely and humanly. Mission is boundary-crossing outreach, and pastoral encounters always demand willingness to allow boundaries to become places for mutual encounter rather than the site of enmity and mutual destruction. We are called both to stand fast in our integrity and to break through lines of division and margins of discrimination or privilege. For standing fast and breaking through are two sides of a single coin, the currency of ministry and mission.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"MY WITNESSES TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH"

(Acts 1:8)

MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP AT THE MARGINS

Pilgrimage and Adventure

Mission, as we have been saying for decades, is not primarily our initiative; it is God's work, and we seek to respond as instruments of the *Missio Dei*, God's eternal mission continued through our discipleship. We try to respond to both the suffering and the smiling faces of God, particularly as they appear in people who are broken, silenced, and marginalized. This was the way of Jesus, and his preferential option for the poor was not merely optional but an urgent imperative. Therefore it is a choice that we *must* choose, as he did. In the words of Jacques Dupuis: "Jesus not only shows a 'preferential option' for the poor, he is not simply 'on their side,' but he personally identifies and associates preferentially with them: he is not simply 'for' the poor, but belongs to them and is with them."[1]

We reflect now specifically on how we continue God's mission by outreach to the margins of society. Though the word

[1] Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 30.

"mission" applies to humanity only derivatively, it can apply to us legitimately if we are truly making the choices Jesus made. It is precisely as the incarnate one—Emmanuel, God-with-us, the human face of God—that Jesus shows each of us how to be authentically human. But in order to grow toward our full human potential, to be restored rather than broken and unfulfilled, we must undertake a missional, outgoing, encountering way of life.

Pastoral ministry has historically been identified with boundedness or the maintenance of an established community within fixed territorial boundaries, while mission has emphasized movement beyond or across boundaries. There is some merit in this distinction, though it must not be pushed too far. If—as should be the case—all pastoral activity must not neglect the missional (centrifugal) dimension, all missional activity must be pastorally sensitive (centripetal). Boundaries, we noted above, are of critical importance: in-between places, ambiguous. They are not deserted but populated with people who exist, living or dying, subsisting or surviving. They are primary sites of the pastoral missional ministry of Jesus and therefore of true disciples.

Victor Turner studied pilgrims and pilgrimages, but he might have been studying mission and missionaries. In a seminal article titled "Center Out There,"[2] he identified a pilgrim's *need* to move from the usual centers of activity to find a more relevant center on the edge of previous experience and, significantly, in the company of strangers who could become friends. This is astonishingly relevant for disciples in today's globalized world. Earlier, sociologist Georg Simmel had spoken of adventure as something that starts on the periphery of one's life but works its way to the very center. In a classic essay[3] he wrote that adventure is "a particular encompassing of the accidentally external by the internally necessary."[4] If the "ac-

[2] Victor Turner, "Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal," *History of Religions* 12, no. 3 (February 1973).

[3] In Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 187–98.

[4] Ibid., 191–92.

cidentally external" refers to whatever is contingent—geographical location or social circumstances—and the "internally necessary" refers to an inner conviction, this characterizes remarkably well the sense of vocation or mission. He speaks of "a characteristic daring with which [an adventurous person] leaves the solidities of life," and the certain conviction of an "unknown and unknowable element in [that person's] life." Hence, to the sober person, "adventurous conduct often seems insanity"[5] (which Jesus was accused of; Mark 3:21)! He claims that only youth are really adventurous and that "the old person usually lives either in a wholly centralized fashion, peripheral interests having fallen off and being unconnected with their essential life and its inner necessity; or the center atrophies, and existence runs its course only in isolated, petty details, accenting mere externals and accidentals."[6] Such cynicism from someone merely fifty-three years old!

It is true that some people's lives, regardless of age, are centralized or self-focused. The call to missionary discipleship invites *everyone* to seek the center precisely *at the margins*. We may have experienced that when something initially peripheral became the very center of our life, becoming "internally necessary." But our commitment must remain solid: disciples cannot retire. So what else can we learn from how Jesus lived, faithful to the end? He is an example of the intrinsic relationship between mission and margins and a reminder of how commitment to both remains "internally necessary" for us today.

From Paradise to Paranoia: The Cultural Flaw[7]

The twin Genesis creation stories paint a picture of chaos transformed into order and a primeval paradise where God and creation—including the human ones created equal in the divine

[5] Ibid., 194.

[6] Ibid., 198.

[7] This is dealt with in greater detail in my book, *A Presence That Disturbs: A Call to Radical Discipleship* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Press, 2002), 94ff.

image (Gen 1:27)—live harmoniously. "And God saw that it was very good." The second story reminds us of the mutuality of the couple: they are one body, one flesh (Gen 2:24), until disobedience brings disharmony and dispersal. But there are two positive byproducts of the Fall: first, "The LORD God said, 'See! The man [that is, male *and* female] has become like one of us, knowing good and evil' " (Gen 3:22); second, the humans were disgraced yet did not lose grace entirely. These two things—conscience and moral knowledge—contain the potential for both humanity's greatness and its shame.

God brings animals and birds to the man: "and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name" (Gen 2:19). The authority to name, gratuitously granted to the man (and elsewhere to the woman), will also become a measure of human control and discrimination: it represents the cultural flaw.[8] Using language to name and define is an act of power: "Light!" says God, and there *was* light; "I name this ship *Invincible*," says the Queen, and it becomes reality; "I declare you husband and wife," says the minister, and they become married. This is the *performative* power of words.[9] To define is both to distinguish and to include. God separated (distinguished) light from darkness, sea from dry land. I define myself by distinction: I am *not* you; Catholics are *not* Protestants; Christians are *not* Muslims. In the mythical harmony of paradise, there was inclusion and a community of "we." But after the Fall there was exclusion, discrimination, and polarization.

If you identify yourself as the norm, you can identify others as abnormal or different. This is dangerous and demeaning. If I define myself as British, Catholic, white, and literate, it is too easy then to define others negatively, as non-British, non-Catholic, non-white, and illiterate. If they define themselves, they would not do so negatively, but positively, perhaps as Chinese American, Presbyterian, and literate. Too often we define others by assumed deficiency or abnormality compared to ourselves.

[8] There is a fuller treatment in ibid., 83–118.

[9] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

By naming and taming, every culture distinguishes, separates, opposes, and excludes as much as it includes, joins, or harmonizes. The cultural flaw is the perverse tendency to see difference through the distorting lenses of distinction, discrimination, dissimilarity, divergence, discord, or disparity. But since God made difference, difference is good, and we are challenged to live, not despite our differences, but with them. In their native Persia, the magi were revered as highly influential and respected. But their neighbors the Jews defined them as foreigners, idolaters, ignorant or contemptuous of God's ways. The law marked and maintained the boundaries between the two peoples, lest Israel become contaminated and fall from grace.

Culture is what humanity does to the world it knows. The sundering of nature, and the very separation and division that Genesis warned about are cultural creations. Explicitly or not, from the raw materials in Genesis, human cultures have remade the world, often riding roughshod over the earth and its people. When "we" is split, ruptured, opposed, and renamed as "me/you," "mine/yours," or "us/them," the cultural flaw (the tendency to reconstruct by deconstructing, and to advance by avoidance or competition rather than encounter and collaboration) is revealed.

Defining the Social World

To create and maintain the social order, every cultural community defines itself first by drawing a notional vertical line between itself and the other, clearly distinguishing insiders from outsiders, natives from foreigners. Sometimes the line may be as concrete as the Berlin Wall or the one defining the border between the United States and Mexico, or a natural feature like an ocean or mountain range. Alternatively, it may be invisible but no less real, marked by linguistic, ethnic, cultural, or religious differences within a nation's borders. The more porous the line, the more it will have both a conjoining and a separating function; the more impermeable, the more exclusionary it is.

But within the insider community itself, every society draws another, horizontal, line, sometimes very visible, sometimes less obvious but no less operational. This line separates "insider participants" (the power-brokers) from insider "nonparticipants" (the powerless); and different societies create and maintain this horizontal line to divide insiders into two groups. The more egalitarian the society, the larger the "insider-participant" group; but some people are always marginal or marginalized.

If the horizontal line were extended and cut across the vertical line, it would create a figure of four quadrants (figure 1).

INSIDER PARTICIPANTS **1**	**OUTSIDER PARTICIPANTS** **3**
2 **INSIDER NONPARTICIPANTS**	**4** **OUTSIDER NONPARTICIPANTS**

Figure 1

The diagram illustrates a social construct, created by the insiders and implicitly but very dangerously, from the patriarchal perspective, two facts that are critical for our understanding of mission. Human cultures are patriarchal.[10] Sadly, the truism holds

[10] There is no record of a truly matriarchal culture, where women alone would exercise authority and control *over both men and women*. "Default matriarchies" are atypical (where the men are absent, at war, imprisoned, or incapable). Matrilineal societies constitute about 16 percent of the world's cultures, but matriliny is a system for tracing descent and some privileges through the maternal line, not about the control of authority. Even where some women have very high status (like the Queen Mother), men still exercise authority, except in an absolute monarchy.

universally: "It's a man's world." But this was not God's idea. Accounts of true matriarchies have been thoroughly discredited. Even when women do occupy the pinnacle of power, they become, in traditional societies, "sociological men": they must be beyond childbearing age and can sometimes become the sociological father (*pater* rather than *genitor*) of children born to women obtained as their fictive wives. This is rare but real; I lived in one such society in West Africa.

Insiders: Participants and Nonparticipants

Quadrant 1 is occupied by the holders of authority: in principle, adult males. Some have moral and/or legal authority, primarily at the domestic level, and some, like military or religious figures, have authority associated with public order. They are the VIPs or number ones.

Quadrant 2 consists of the people regarded in a particular society—by the VIPs or number ones (who vary across societies)—as expendable, useless, or without authority. There are three primary groups: the immature (as yet unborn, infants, and children), the deviant (physically, mentally, or morally), and women. In certain circumstances, some of these may move into quadrant 1. The unborn can be brought to term, given birth, and grow to maturity. Infants (literally, "lacking language") can acquire language. And children (lacking sexual identity) can become mature adults. Likewise, criminals might reform, and some other deviants may become rehabilitated. But only adult males can graduate into quadrant 1. Women are socially inferior.

Rarely throughout history, and always under socially prescribed conditions, have women moved from quadrant 2 to quadrant 1. Their place is believed to be within the domestic sphere, but their primary function is considered to be their contribution to the honor of their menfolk, for they cannot accrue honor themselves. Women are thus potentially dangerous because they may bring shame upon their menfolk and therefore must be controlled and kept in their place. Contemporary instances of

"honor killings" exemplify this social fact: men are in control. But women are not powerless, as every woman, and some men, appreciate. But widely, women are largely confined within, or on the margins of, their quadrant, simply because they are not men.

A final group within quadrant 2 is nonparticipating males, including everyone, even able-bodied men, who contribute nothing to the common good: social parasites. They exist universally. Unlike many women who live thankless and unacknowledged lives of service, or some identified as deviant, such men are a burden and a scandal.

	INSIDERS	**OUTSIDERS**
PARTICIPANTS	**ADULT MALES/VIPs** Holders of authority (legitimated authorization) and power (strength, force, control, dominance) • **SIGNIFICANT OTHERS; LEGITIMATORS*** ○ HOUSEHOLD HEADS ○ MEMBERS OF PROFESSIONS Physicians, lawyers, bankers, clergy, teachers, nurses etc. ○ APPOINTED OR ELECTED LEADERS • **THOSE WITH POWER OF SANCTION** ○ MILITARY, CIVIL DEFENSE, POLICE ○ RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES ○ POLITICAL AUTHORITIES ○ LEGAL AUTHORITIES	**SOCIOLOGICAL STRANGERS** People who leave their own environment, for a substantial period, in order to live with and contribute to and complement another (often struggling) community • GĒR (Hebrew): "Resident alien" • MISSIONARIES • MISSIONAL CHRISTIANS • ALL TRUE BENEFACTORS • **JESUS**
NON-PARTICIPANTS	**NON-ADULT MALES/NOBODIES** People without authority (lacking social identity) and with limited power (though not completely powerless) • **THE IMMATURE** ○ The unborn: lacking viability ○ Infants: lacking language ○ Children: lacking sexual identity • **THE DEVIANT** ○ Physically: cripples, the sick ○ Mentally: insane, crazy, possessed ○ Morally: criminals, prostitutes, 'sinners' • **WOMEN** • **NON-PARTICIPATING MALES** ○ Social parasites; laggards	**A WIDE VARIETY OF PEOPLE CHARACTERIZED BY THEIR PRESENCE IN A SOCIAL WORLD NOT THEIR OWN** • **SOME MAY BE RELATIVELY BENIGN** ○ SHORT-TERM MISSIONARIES Who control their agenda and conditions of stay; fail to learn to be strangers or undergo the transition to acceptance by the local people ○ TOURISTS who treat other people with respect • **SOME ARE MUCH MORE DANGEROUS** ○ VANDALS ○ INVADERS ○ CRUSADERS

Figure 2

* 'Significant others' here are persons with legal authority but appeal primarily to their moral authority: example and persuasion rather than physical force or the threat of sanctions: parents, teachers and so on. 'Legitimators' exercise legal authority and the power of sanction: civil authorities such as the police.

This portrayal may seem bleak, but it is simply an attempt to sketch *la condition humaine*: the cultural lot of people throughout history and across cultures. It is the cultural flaw or "original sin," the universal cultural bias. And its existence or reality poses a direct challenge to anyone committed to the Christian mission.

Outsiders: Participants and Nonparticipants

The two quadrants on the right side of the diagram contain the people, again, seen from the perspective of the insiders as "outsiders." In quadrant 3 they are "nonparticipating outsiders." In cultures whose boundaries or borders are nonporous and whose members are extremely xenophobic, there may be virtually no such people: they are either irrelevant or simply unknown. Even today there are some social groups virtually cut off from contact with a world beyond their own. But in our globalized world we identify three categories. First, outsiders who are parasites or transients. The second category includes tourists who pay their way but are generally nonparticipating: their purpose is selfish if relatively harmless. They may contribute to local economies, but that is not their *raison d'etre*. And third, unwanted outsiders: invaders, imperial agents, or interfering busybodies, including, sadly, some missionaries.

These days, volunteerism or short mission trips (TTL 76) raise a question: given the good intentions of these outsiders, how do insiders perceive them? One does not become an outsider-participant automatically: that is an ascribed rather than achieved status. So, what is the outsiders' perceived social identity: participants or nonparticipants, independent or interdependent? And what are the implications?

We must look more closely at quadrant 4: "outsider-participants." Their specific purpose is to contribute—*precisely as outsiders and with their particular perspectives and gifts*—to the well-being of the insiders, especially the nobodies, the nonparticipant insiders. Such people can champion the nobodies when many insider-participants exploit or ignore this underclass. In quadrant 4, the

operative words—"outsiders" and "participant"—are held together in tension, as each contributes something particular to the interaction between insider and outsider (initially "us" and "them"). Sociologically, classic outsider-participants, initially identified by the insiders as rank outsiders ("them"), pass through structured stages to a new social status. No longer simply interlopers or tourists, they now have the new ascribed sociological status: stranger. This stranger is different from the sojourner or bird-of-passage and now has the status of (semi-)permanent resident with prescribed and appropriate roles clearly delimited and different from those of the insiders. Biblically, this stranger (*gēr*) has specified rights and duties, quite different from the *nokri*—the sojourner or transient—who is accorded safe passage but must not tarry and has no permanent status within the community.

Would-be strangers (*gēr*) cannot foist themselves on the community and must pass through the period of trial and testing before being accepted by the host community. Although the stranger's contribution can be life-giving, strangers can also be deadly. ("I fear the Greeks bearing gifts" is the well-known line from Virgil's *Aeneid*). Both insiders and strangers must act with caution, and strangers live with some ambiguity precisely because they are not entirely integrated, never insiders, and thus inherently marginal. Yet their potential is enormous.

The Missional Potential of Jesus and Other Strangers

In TTL 70–71 the writers identify the stranger as an outsider but fail to identify themselves with such a person, as outsiders themselves. They assume the perspective of insiders ("us") and consider their responsibility to treat migrants ("them") with kindness and respect. This is commendable, and even biblical, as far as it goes. But that is not as far as Jesus went. Paragraph 71 identifies God as the host and us as guests, invited into God's mission. This is neat but inadequate. Not clinging to his own privilege but assuming a *kenotic*, self-emptying status, he said, "I *was* a stranger" (Matt 25:35). As a stranger Jesus chose a marginal

ministry (in, or on the edge of, quadrant 4). If he were only and always the host he would remain in quadrant 1. Because Jesus was an itinerant, alternately host, guest, and stranger, we have work to do. His choices have profound implications for his way of mission, and for our way of imitating him.[11]

How did Jesus minister as outsider-participant or stranger? First, we distinguish the social status of host, guest, and stranger. Some guests are distinguished or high-ranking, but the host generally has superior status, authority, and initiative. Host and guest constitute a complementary, dyadic pair; the word "host" presumes a guest and vice versa. But host and stranger is another dyad, and the host always has control. In many languages, a single word applies to both guest and stranger, but they are very different statuses: to be a guest is rather more congenial than to be a stranger. English has two distinct words with very different connotations: a stranger is often ignored or abused, but a guest is welcomed and indulged.

No community can indulge an outsider indefinitely; the host's tolerance will fade as resources are stretched. So unless guests leave, they must contribute to the common good. This involves a change to the role of less-privileged stranger: to be willing to learn, undemanding and helpful, and showing patient endurance under continual scrutiny. The community host needs time to assess the acceptability of the would-be participant-outsider, the stranger. Henri Nouwen says, "Being poor and a stranger is what Jesus invites us to, and that is much, much harder than serving the poor. The unnoticed, unspectacular, unpraised life in solidarity with people who cannot give anything that makes us feel important is far from attractive. It is the way of poverty. Not an easy way, but God's way, the way of the Cross."[12]

[11] See K. Koyama, "'Extend Hospitality to Strangers': A Missiology of *Theologia Crucis*," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 82 (1993): 283–95; also Anthony J. Gittins, "Beyond Hospitality? The Missionary Status and Role Revisited," *Currents in Theology and Mission* (1994): 164–82.

[12] Henri Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1988).

Jesus: Marginal by Circumstance and by Choice

Identifying events from his birth to his death underlines circumstances that mark Jesus as very far from the norm, normal, or ordinary. The Incarnate One of God, begotten not conceived, is born "on the road," on civilization's margins, among animals rather than human society, and welcomed by angels, shepherds, and magi—three of the most abnormal or marginal beings imaginable. The angels' message came, not to insiders—the Chief Priests or King Herod—but to those judged unclean and irreligious (shepherds) or unclean idolaters (the magi).[13] The story continues with death threats and flight under the cover of night. And this is only the beginning; Jesus' end is no less marginal: again outside the city walls and crucified as a criminal blasphemer—a classic outsider nonparticipant from the perspective of the religious and civil authorities.

Jesus was marginalized by circumstance, but no less by choice. An itinerant preacher and teacher with no official credentials, he associated not only with people who were patently nonparticipant *insiders* but with nonparticipant *outsiders* and other lost sheep. Most of his closest companions were rough and ready, hardly élite, and so numerous and motley a crew as to bring ridicule on his ostensible status as a rabbi, since no self-respecting rabbi would have more than two or three disciples at one time—and those would have been intelligent, focused, and upright people: number ones.

Apart from saying he had nowhere to lay his head—even less than foxes or birds—he did not aspire to respectability as defined by religious or civil authorities but challenged the prevalent understanding of legitimate authority, power, and status. He left the centers and chose the margins, as he challenged and sometimes condemned those at the centers, while distinctly favoring marginalized people. Therefore he was publicly criticized for eating "with tax collectors and sinners." We need not gild the lily or romanticize here: Jesus was a marginal man but also one

[13] Scott Hahn sketches a helpful vignette of shepherds, angels, and magi, in *Joy to the World: How Christ's Coming Changed Everything (and Still Does)* (New York: Image Books, 2014), 107–25.

who participated, as an outsider, not only with other outsiders but with any sympathetic insiders.

Jesus: A Double-Focused Ministry

The missional ministry of Jesus was to reach out and embrace everyone. His initial outreach was to "the lost sheep of the House of Israel"—effectively every Jew, including both Israel and Judah, since this was a time of occupation, shaken faith, a history of displacement, and God's apparent dilatoriness. But, and with reminders from the urging of the Syrophonician woman, his net was thrown as wide as geographical and chronological constraints allowed. Given this inclusiveness, though conscious of the "preferential option for the poor" that he identified as God's own attentiveness (Psalm 34's "God hears the cry of the poor"), we superimpose or map his strategy on the diagram (fig 3).

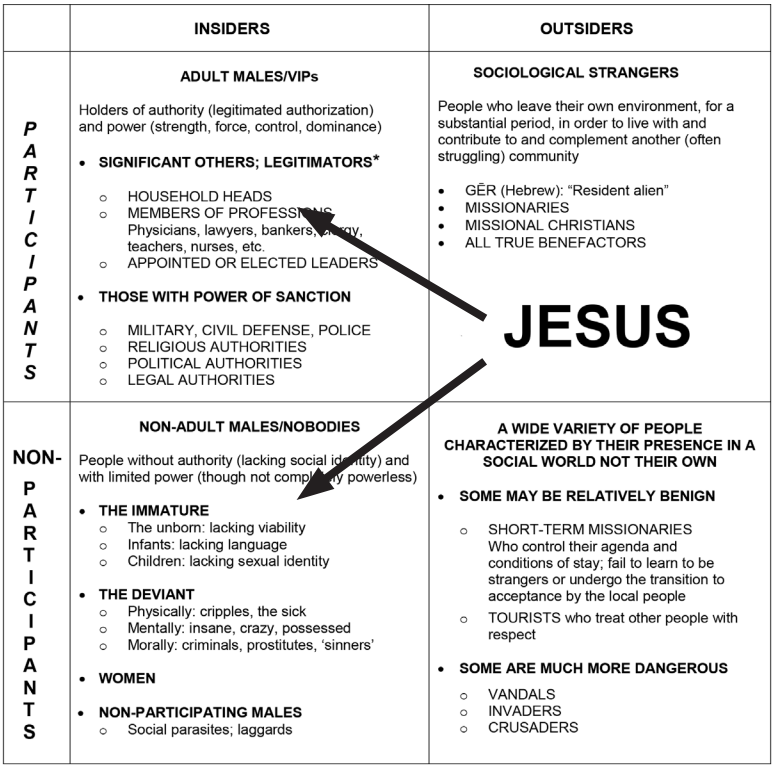
INSIDERS
OUTSIDERS
PARTICIPANTS
ADULT MALES/VIPs
Holders of authority (legitimated authorization) and power (strength, force, control, dominance)
SIGNIFICANT OTHERS; LEGITIMATORS*
HOUSEHOLD HEADS
MEMBERS OF PROFESSIONS
Physicians, lawyers, bankers, clergy, teachers, nurses, etc.
APPOINTED OR ELECTED LEADERS
THOSE WITH POWER OF SANCTION
MILITARY, CIVIL DEFENSE, POLICE
RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES
POLITICAL AUTHORITIES
LEGAL AUTHORITIES
SOCIOLOGICAL STRANGERS
People who leave their own environment, for a substantial period, in order to live with and contribute to and complement another (often struggling) community
GĒR (Hebrew): "Resident alien"
MISSIONARIES
MISSIONAL CHRISTIANS
ALL TRUE BENEFACTORS
JESUS
NON-PARTICIPANTS
NON-ADULT MALES/NOBODIES
People without authority (lacking social identity) and with limited power (though not completely powerless)
THE IMMATURE
The unborn: lacking viability
Infants: lacking language
Children: lacking sexual identity
THE DEVIANT
Physically: cripples, the sick
Mentally: insane, crazy, possessed
Morally: criminals, prostitutes, 'sinners'
WOMEN
NON-PARTICIPATING MALES
Social parasites; laggards
A WIDE VARIETY OF PEOPLE CHARACTERIZED BY THEIR PRESENCE IN A SOCIAL WORLD NOT THEIR OWN
SOME MAY BE RELATIVELY BENIGN
SHORT-TERM MISSIONARIES
Who control their agenda and conditions of stay; fail to learn to be strangers or undergo the transition to acceptance by the local people
TOURISTS who treat other people with respect
SOME ARE MUCH MORE DANGEROUS
VANDALS
INVADERS
CRUSADERS

Figure 3

Jesus was considered marginal, and even mad by his peers, and his itinerant ministry as a stranger places him consistently along the margins between the insiders and the outsiders. From there (somewhere in quadrant 4) his first outreach is directed diagonally, to the people in quadrant 2 (see fig 2). The New Testament calls them generically the "crowds" (*ochloi*) or "poor" (*ptochoi*). They are *precisely* the immature (children and infants), the deviant (crippled, sick, possessed, tax collectors, prostitutes, sinners), and the largely invisible women, socially and religiously: these are John Dominic Crossan's "nobodies." We recall that women and children were not counted with the five thousand, that when Jesus spoke with the woman at the well, "the disciples were astonished that he was talking to a woman" (John 4:27), and that not a single woman in the gospels is given the title of "disciple."[14] Such virtual invisibility and lack of acknowledgment has dogged women ever since, to the church's shame. TTL 45 is good here: having spoken of our participation in God's mission of "deconstructing patriarchal ideologies," it says God's mission "entails the restoration of right relationships between God and humanity and all of creation" by "following the way of Jesus, who came to serve, not to be served, who exalts the lowly, and whose love is characterized by mutuality, reciprocity and interdependence": precisely the kenotic ministry of the outsider-participant.

But Jesus has a second, simultaneous outreach, directed laterally to those in quadrant 1. These are the number ones, whom Jesus sometimes identifies as "the first" who will be "the last," excoriating "the haves." Luke's Beatitudes echo this: "Woe to you who are rich, who have your fill, who laugh, and of whom the world speaks well" (cf. Luke 6:24-26). In the diagram they are identified as men in authority or power: teachers, police or military forces, and civil and religious authorities. In approaching the nobodies Jesus is attempting to restore them to society; in approaching the number ones, he is reproaching them insofar as

[14] The only woman identified by the feminine form of the word "disciple" (*mathētria*) is Tabitha in Acts 9:36.

they exclude and oppress the nobodies in the emperor's, or even God's, name: "Unless you change and become like children [nobodies], you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 18:3).

"Together Towards Life" invites further reflection. "People on the margins have agency and can often see what, from the centre [quadrant 1] is out of view" (TTL 38). Moreover, "Jesus relates to and embraces those who are most marginalized, *in order to confront and transform all that denies life*" (largely quadrant 1), and "marginalized people have God-given gifts" (TTL 37, 39). This is a helpful counterbalance to the emphasis on the evident advantages of quadrant 1 ("access to systems that lead to one's rights, freedom, and individuality being affirmed and respected") and the disadvantages of quadrant 2 ("exclusion from justice and dignity") (TTL 37–40). Since Jesus actually *chose* a marginal lifestyle, we must try to understand its intrinsic missional potential: people pushed to the margins certainly have gifts, but so do those who, like Jesus, actively seek those people and become marginal themselves.

There is a timely admission (TTL 41) of the imperialistic style of some missionary approaches: "mission from the centre is motivated by an attitude of paternalism and a superiority complex"; but either this fails to acknowledge that people at the centers *are able* to use their position—like St. Francis—deliberately to move away from the centers and become examples of real missionary discipleship, and/or it paints everyone with high social status or *cachet* as incapable of personal conversion. True, people who protect their positions of power and influence cannot participate in the kingdom—*unless they move* to the margins they currently fail to defend and protect. But that must always remain a possibility, as paragraph 33 affirms: "The cross calls for repentance in the light of misuse of power and use of the wrong kind of power."

We have identified two margins: horizontal (between participant and nonparticipant insiders) and vertical (between insiders and outsiders). But the center of mission is always at the margins, wherever they are. Those who refuse to move, not simply to the margins, but specifically to engage with those who live there,

are, says Jesus, "not worthy," including "whoever loves father or mother more than me" and "whoever does not take up the cross and follow me" (Matt 10:37-38).

Mission in the Spirit of Jesus

We will return to this topic again but must first draw the threads of this chapter together. The more technical language of missiology may be too abstract for many disciples today, so we consider a very practical way to follow the Way of Jesus—one that anyone, young or old, academic or not, can attempt. Evangelization is primarily and essentially the way Jesus not only proclaims but also embodies the Good News: he *is* good news in everything he does. If we comb the New Testament seeking the components of the *integral evangelization* of Jesus—the core elements of his mission and ministry—we can identify them as *proclamation*, *witness*, *dialogue*, and *liberation*.[15] They embrace his whole ministry, bringing God's eternal mission down to earth. As integral is opposed to partial or disintegrated, so, like Jesus, we must incorporate every one,[16] and not simply pick and choose. They raise serious questions for each of us.

Encounter. As the only way to love, this is the key to Jesus' mission; he encounters people one by one, excluding nobody. Reflecting on his encounters, we are called to ponder our own. Whom do we love? Whom do we avoid? What is the quality of our encounters? How familiar are we with the margins and those who live there?

Table-fellowship. The biggest single reason for his death and the mark of his marginal ministry, Jesus' table-fellowship is radically inclusive. What about me? With whom do I eat and whom

[15] Others have identified integral evangelization slightly differently. See Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

[16] I develop these further in *The Way of Discipleship: Women, Men, and Today's Call to Mission* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 58–63.

do I avoid? Do I like the role of host, or guest—and what about stranger? Against whom do I discriminate? Those who share one Lord, one faith, and one baptism should be a community of *we*, not polarized as *us* and *them*. But Christians are far from being one community. In the name of the one who excluded nobody, how can we exclude our own siblings from eucharistic table-fellowship?

Foot-washing. Having washed Peter's feet—a patent act of humility—Jesus commanded the Twelve to wash other people's feet. Whose feet do I wash, literally or figuratively? Whom do I expect to wash my feet? Whose feet would I never think to wash? When Pope Francis washed feet on Maundy Thursday, his response to those who took offense was that he was only doing what Jesus commanded. This, of course, failed to satisfy some pious people.

Boundary-crossing. Jesus' entire life was spent negotiating boundaries and margins, encountering and restoring those trapped there. People blamed the victims, but Jesus identified and exposed their bad theology. Boundaries and margins offer opportunity, and Jesus erased them by his own presence,[17] using them to include the excluded. He has set the bar very high for us. He warned the Twelve that the call to discipleship was impossible, but not for those who trust, follow, and, by God's grace, remain faithful (Mark 10:27).

[17] Paul expresses this magnificently in Ephesians 2, especially verses 11-14.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"AS I HAVE DONE, YOU SHOULD DO ALSO"

(John 13:15)

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO DIVERSITY

Diversity: Is There an Alternative?

The Dignity of Difference is the striking title already mentioned[1] and an excellent point of departure for our topic. How might we live in an increasingly pluralistic world? Rabbi Jonathan Sacks considers the current "search-for-common-values" approach to be inadequate and offers an alternative paradigm, urging us actively to create space for differences to flourish. Since God created the universe's astounding diversity, difference is, in principle, very good and mere tolerance or disinterested pluralism is insufficient. The unity of the Creator is actualized and expressed clearly and extravagantly in the diversity of creation.[2] "If our commonalities are all that ultimately matter," he says, "our differences are distractions to be overcome. This view is profoundly mistaken."[3] So how can we meet the challenge, live our faith, and respect the dignity of difference?

[1] Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London: Continuum, 2002).

[2] Partly excerpted from front cover of ibid.

[3] Ibid., 48.

Missional engagements involve margins or boundaries and are encounters with great diversity, including human differences, which manifest God's many faces. The concept of mission, then, stands in apposition (not opposition) to *all* the prepositions: *to*, *for*, *by*, *with*, *from*, and *among* people. A wild pendulum swing—a shift from mission *to* to mission *from*—may obscure an essential component of mission in the spirit of Jesus: deep mutuality, interdependence, indebtedness, and respect.

Apart from human diversity, the diversity of faiths and philosophies, paths and purposes, must be acknowledged. Meaning is not universally self-evident but imposed by cultural and religious agency. The dialectical imagination identifies distinctions and differences, while the analogical finds similarities within or beneath those differences. A rabidly dialectical approach to human diversity precludes honest encounter and conversation.[4] In our pluralistic world, a more tempered approach is possible only with an analogical imagination that seeks to discover mutual compatibility and tolerance.

Sacks identifies Judaism with an attempt to respect the both/and approach, while Greece and Rome, Plato and Aristotle—and subsequently Christianity and Islam—espoused the either/or perspective. Today, Christian theology increasingly seeks to be more irenic and respectful of differences by adopting a more inclusive perspective. Yet Christianity remains fearful or suspicious of relativism. The challenge is to be tolerant of differences and gracious to "the other" but to retain principles and convictions; self-righteous and dogmatic people with a dialectical mind-set cannot live with this challenge. Convinced they are informed, right, and Godly, they judge people with different beliefs or opinions as ignorant, wrong, and ungodly. "From this," says Sacks, "flowed some of the great crimes of history, some under religious auspices, others under the banner of secular philosophies."[5]

[4] See previous chapter and references to David Tracy, p. 88.

[5] Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 50.

We recall the Crusades; and perhaps St. Bernard's infamous justification of the killing of infidels not as homicide but as "malicide," and his statement that "the Christian glories in the death of the pagan, because Christ is glorified";[6] as well as Christians' ownership and treatment of slaves; and more. We are ashamed of the heinous errors resulting from dogmatic universalism ("outside the church, no salvation"; "error has no rights") and coercive practices perpetrated in God's name. Yet we are no less aware of the danger of absolute relativism, the notion that people can do whatever they choose with impunity. So how can we address the evident social fact of diversity, not merely by tolerance, but by showing respect, unless we move away from a rigidly exclusivist approach to a more analogical or inclusivist one? And what might happen, then, to the truth we sometimes confuse with our personal or religious convictions?

A starting point is Jesus' caution: "Do not judge" (Matt 7:5), embellished in Romans 14:4 and James 4:12 as "Who are you to pass verdict on your neighbor?" Holding legitimate personal or private convictions does not entitle us to impose them on others; coercion is sinful. But historically this has been very difficult to accept for those whose Christian socialization had a dogmatic, judgmental cast. Sacks's focus on the *dignity* of difference is not an invitation to become absolute relativists and lose all sense of right or wrong; rather, it is a reminder that we are not God, that differences can be mutually beneficial, and that recourse to coercion or condemnation is quite unacceptable.

Humans universally use language, yet there is no universal language; each language is the product of a specific community and strictly incommensurable with any other. Likewise, "God is God of all humanity, but no single faith is or should be the faith of all humanity."[7] But this very Jewish perspective does not

[6] St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Praise of the New Knighthood: A Treatise on the Knights Templar and the Holy Places of Jerusalem*, Cistercian Fathers 25 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2000).

[7] Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 55.

sit well with many people. The sheer reality of diversity invites options: to admit, accept, approach, or attack it. Human history amply documents the use of all four options, and Christians have not always responded in a Christian fashion. There are billions of people alive today, tens of thousands of cultures, and thousands of languages, but there is only one single human race: one common yet marvelously diversified humanity. Our challenge is not to live despite diversity but with and among it, with mutual respect. Astonishingly, it *is* possible for us to communicate with people of any language or culture. One reason for xenophobia and fear of diversity is the cultural flaw: the human propensity to divide and conquer, oppose and confront, separate and discriminate. But another may well be our tendency to religious intolerance and the aggressive defense of "my truth" against all comers. Perhaps we have selectively taken to heart the words, "Whoever is not with me is against me" (Matt 12:30; Luke 11:23), and overlooked those other words, "Whoever is not against you is for you" (Luke 9:50; Mark 9:40). This has justified preemptive strikes—forced conversions, the Inquisition, and the rest—against people who are different. Yet to strip scriptural sayings from their context and to act as judge and jury flies in the face of the very gospel we preach.

Why Is There Such a Problem?

A little ethnographic detail can throw light on the challenge of diversity and might indicate that some problems encountered by Christians need not and should not be so. Human twins occur in approximately one in eighty births, but in other animals multiple births are perfectly normal. Empirically, the general rule is that animals give birth to multiple offspring but humans reproduce one child at a time; twins are not only unusual but strictly abnormal. Specific cultures (of which religion is a major constituent) determine the value of twins. In some, they are seen as a category mistake that must be rectified, either by removing or killing one twin (thereby restoring the natural order between humans and animals) or by abandoning them. Alternatively, both twins may

be retained but enhanced, elevated to a kind of "super-normal" status and treated with particular respect and not a little fear—for they are, after all, still out of the ordinary: "abnormal." They cannot simply be left among the general population and treated exactly like everyone else, because they are noticeably different.

In Sierra Leone,[8] each twin was believed to pose a threat to one parent, but neither parent knew which twin to fear so they treated both with excessive care and privilege. Moreover, there is such a thing as a "single twin," for if the mother dreams she is pregnant with twins, the result, whether one or two—or three—is designated a twin and treated accordingly. In the past half century, ultrasound and endoscopic photography have shown that up to 60 percent of twin pregnancies lose one of the fetuses around the end of the first trimester, often unknown to, though sometimes suspected by, the mother. This is surprisingly consistent with the maternal instinct of a Mende woman who delivers a single baby considered to be a twin. In Sierra Leone, not only were few girls able to go to school but many parents could not afford to send their boys. Yet routinely twins were highly overrepresented in school because of their privileged status—and parental fear of reprisals!

Similar attitudes, positive and negative, are found cross-culturally as people relate to babies born with a cleft palate or other abnormality, particularly with respect to their sexual identity. Some societies practice infanticide in such cases, but not the Nyimba of Nepal—a small group of hybrid Buddhist-shamanistic practitioners. Unlike many communities we know, they are never short of a priest or shaman, because when a male child is born with a visible "abnormality," like an undescended testicle or a club foot, he is immediately welcomed as a shaman-to-be and considered as intentionally marked and signed by God in this way. In East Africa, the Pokot have a very relaxed attitude to gender assignment; when a boy child grows up with

[8] I served as a missionary and anthropologist among the Mende of Sierra Leone for almost a decade.

decidedly "girlish" traits, or a girl with "boyish" behavior patterns,[9] they simply say that God has made a little mistake but, no matter, that's perfectly acceptable—God's privilege!

To return to diversity: theoretically, people may treat whatever is perceived as different in one of three ways. If deemed negative or bad, it can be punished; if positive or good, rewarded; and when difference is deemed neutral or indifferent, it is tolerated or respected. But—again, because of the cultural flaw[10]—humanity has a great deal of trouble with the last of these. People with a dialectical approach to life see things as either/or, and there is no middle ground. Those with a moralizing perspective are much quicker to pass judgment on whatever is different, than to say *vive la différence!* Many people want to allocate or relocate, to appraise or evaluate, but find it very difficult to withhold judgment and show tolerance, or simply to let others, and their differences, be. People of every culture know what is normal (to them) and identify, categorize, and judge the abnormal. But these are cultural and religious constructs first, however strongly some people may defend them as God's immutable law. Jesus was constantly challenging people: "You have heard it said, but I say to you." He confronted their cultural and religious values with his word, stimulating both conversion and condemnation.

The Jesus Solution: Removing the Barrier

As Paul says so lyrically, "The law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:24-28; see also Col 3:11; 1 Cor 12:12-13).

[9] Evidently, "girlish" and "boyish" are culturally determined.

[10] See previous chapter.

Such revolutionary talk does not remove the gender distinction any more than it removes the ethnic or social distinction, but it does abolish the moral and legal distinctions that turn simple differences into justification for discrimination. From now on, therefore, Christians are to be decidedly countercultural in their treatment of fellow human beings. This is almost overwhelmingly difficult because of the cultural flaw (or original sin) and our determination to discriminate where God has gathered and blessed, as when we belittle people who are different and privilege those like ourselves.

The Way of Jesus has been a clear challenge, yet after two thousand years we have not developed very good instincts for managing diversity. But we know the Letter to the Philippians, from a little earlier, where Paul says much the same thing: "If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each one of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. who . . . did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited" (Phil 2:1-5).

People with a common purpose and a common mind are not clones; diversity evidently exists within the broader unity. In the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul spells out his thesis in much greater detail, showing precisely how Jesus approached the diversity that produces divisions in society and polarizes people. He begins by highlighting the polarization in his society. "You were dead," he says, "following the course of this world" (including himself in that category prior to his own conversion; Eph 2:1-3). But through Christ, God restored people to life. The neophytes have been reassigned but not assimilated: they are no longer *them* but part of a new inclusive category, *we*: "[A]t one time you Gentiles by birth, called 'the uncircumcision' by those who are called 'the circumcision'—a physical circumcision made in the flesh

by human hands—remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens[11] from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants. . . . But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph 2:11-13).

He then shows how the line that divided insiders and outsiders culturally is no longer operative for members of the Christian community—though it continues, perversely, to exist and to harden in civil society. "For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. . . . [So] that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body" (Eph 2:14-16). Paul concludes that the us/them distinction no longer pertains: "You are no longer strangers and aliens ['them'], but you are citizens with the saints ['us'] and also members of the household of God ['we']" (Eph 2:19).

This is a magnificent exposition of the capacity of Judaism and Christianity to promote the dignity of difference and use diversity to build rather than to destroy people and society. But it remains an impossible dream unless people—and Christians *a fortiori*, since we publicly profess it—strive to make it a reality.

The Persistence of the Cultural Flaw

Tragically and persistently, Christians have rebuilt and reinforced the very dividing line Jesus came to abolish. In the first three centuries, Christianity was powerless and Christians were marginalized, obscure, and indeed perceived as "the other." They knew the cultural flaw embedded in the Roman Empire, being treated as "nobodies" and alternately as outsiders or nonparticipant insiders. Yet Christianity gradually succeeded not only because of its tenacity in the face of opposition or even because of

[11] "Aliens" and "strangers" here: two classic examples of the nonparticipant outsider considered earlier.

the patronage of Constantine, but in large measure because of Christians' own exemplification of compassionate inclusiveness and exemplary patience.[12] Even when they became tolerated, then official, and finally dominant insider participants, enough Christians remained committed to the nonparticipant "other," and the missionary movement ensured the expansion of Christianity to and among those on the margins—the country folk, pagan, and barbarian outsiders. Christianity offered people dignity and security. Not all was sweetness and light, but for several centuries Christianity coexisted peacefully alongside the other Abrahamic religions. In an era of noncompeting monotheisms, Europe was gradually built on the firm foundations of Jewish mercantilism and Muslim art and architecture, no less than on Christian doctrine, monasticism, and missions—as well as on the accumulated learning of all three.

But as Christianity became stronger it also became more assertive, and its relationships with the cultural and religious other became tainted by suspicion and competition. Collaboration sometimes stiffened into mere toleration and sometimes gave way to outright persecution, without and within. Rodney Stark's analysis of how and why noncompeting monotheisms can become competitive and destructive[13] explains not only the rise of Christian anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim outbursts, from before the Crusades to the expulsion of Jews from Spain and England, but also the current Islamist crusades against the West.

Islam officially identified non-Muslims as inferior, but in practice Jews and Muslims became neighbors and traders. Jewish networks of kinship and affinity extended their mercantile links

[12] A careful and detailed discussion of Christian persistence is Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016).

[13] Rodney Stark, *One True God: Historical Consequences of Monotheism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); and *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

from Spain to India with great centers in Cairo and Cordoba, as Jews gradually became preeminent and indispensable shippers, importers, and suppliers to the medieval world and pioneers of international business methods. But Islamic law also prohibited Jews from carrying gold across borders, so they carried only paper money, the twelfth-century equivalent of a banker's check, quickly becoming international importers and exporters. From the eighth century, the Umayyad Caliphate centered in Cordoba was also a great center of Sephardic Jewish life, with synagogues side by side with mosques, while in Lincoln, England, the richest person and patron of both Crown and Church was Aaron, a Jewish man whose financial loans underwrote the building of the both the cathedral and Palace of Lincoln, sixteen abbeys, and numerous royal buildings.

But by the end of the twelfth century, relationships had turned deadly as rival monotheisms fought for the control of Andalucia, home for centuries to both Jew and Muslim. As Christian kings reconquered Spain from the north, fundamentalist Muslims from Morocco in the south were driving north, so that both the moderate Muslim and the orthodox Jew suffered from both Cross and Crescent, while in the next century, Muslim rule in Andalucia collapsed completely. Meanwhile, the Jews—welcome in England since the invitation of William the Conqueror in 1066—were becoming targets of bitter resentment. Since, under penalty of usury, Christians could not borrow money from fellow Christians, Jews also became great financiers, holding the debts and mortgages of both Church and Crown. But in 1189 King Richard the Lionheart—who would call the Third Crusade against the Muslims—ordered all Jews in England to convert to Christianity. Some did, others committed suicide, while many fled, and a century of blood-libel and victimization of Jews ensued. Exactly one century later, in 1290, Edward I expelled all remaining Jews, not incidentally relieving himself and his subjects of an unbearable and unpayable debt.

When a monotheistic faith is threatened, by objective force or irrational fear, collaboration and even coexistence become

impossible. The Church created and reinforced a dividing line, branding Jews and Muslims no longer as compatriots but as aliens, outsiders, and enemies: *them* as opposed to *us*. What Jesus came to unite, Christians succeeded in dividing again in his name. History demonstrates that people of different monotheistic religions can coexist in peace, and with great collaboration and mutual respect. But when one feels threatened, some of its members always act violently toward those now labeled as aliens in their midst.

In order to minimize the use of violence, therefore, the conditions that are believed to constitute the threat must be removed. Ideally this should lead to an increase of religious diversity and the fostering of civility and courtesy, without a concomitant loss of personal or religious commitment. Sadly, this is precisely where the cultural flaw shows itself: people find it so difficult to accept the dignity of difference and to respect diversity without becoming absolute relativists or feeling they are compromising their conscience, "the Truth," and are being unfaithful to God. The dilemma is stark: do we attempt to create and maintain an impossible world of uniformity of belief and action where there are no boundaries marking us and them because we are all one, or do we encourage and foster a nightmare of anarchy with unlimited diversity to the point where everyone acts entirely as they wish and does exactly what they want? Ironically, without some boundaries and limits and some control over unlicensed diversity, it is impossible to visualize human society at all, hence the cultural flaw.

Creation of Heresy and Intolerance of Diversity

The dividing line was not only drawn between insiders and rank outsiders but also being drawn within the church. Internal reform movements alienated Christians from one another through excommunications, while those from without were met by aggression and executions. It has been persuasively argued[14]

[14] R. I. Moore, *The War on Heresy* (Boston, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

that the Cathars of the thirteenth century were not followers of some eastern dualistic Manichaeism but radical Catholics who posed a threat to the institutional church. The crusade against them became "the first significant laboratory for inquisitions, a new institution of ecclesiastical enquiry and discipline."[15] From the first Western burnings for Christian heresy in Orléans about 1022 to long after the Gregorian Reforms later that century, through multiple Inquisitions concerned with the detection and prosecution of heresy, to the sixteenth-century Reformations, and on to the Syllabus of Errors of 1864 and beyond, lines were drawn to divide Christians against Christians and were then defended by utterly unconscionable means.

Such lines were intended to provide definition and clarify boundaries and also nucleated and enclosed one group and clearly separated it from another. Moreover they emphasized the power and authority of the insider participants ("number ones") at the expense of other insiders who were forcibly disempowered or dismissed. As R. I. Moore shows, the accusation of heresy against those labeled "Cathari" was in retaliation against Christians who criticized the church for failing in its mission, and the clergy, who had become distanced from the people and tainted with clericalism and ambition. Ecclesiastical pomp and circumstance was a flagrant contradiction of Gospel values.

But now the accused retaliated, attempting to silence critics and protect the institution. Perhaps the most notorious and barbaric act of the Albigensian Crusade (against the Cathari) was the siege and slaughter at Béziers. In 1209, having first absolved the future sins of the crusaders, the pope ordered the abbot of Cîteaux to lead the charge against two hundred putative Cathars. Unable to identify them personally, they were ordered: "Kill everyone; the Lord will know his own"; almost twenty thousand people were burned alive or put to the sword that day.[16] The chronicler wrote:

[15] Diarmuid McCulloch, Review of R. I. Moore, in *Times Literary Supplement* (July 6, 2012): 3.

[16] Moore, *The War on Heresy*, 247.

"The whole city was despoiled and burned as divine vengeance raged marvelously."[17]

An authoritarian institution threatened by serious dissent or challenge creates lines of demarcation and fortifies boundaries. Fear that rival opinions will produce relativism or anarchy is met with measures reinforced by legal or religious sanctions. Dissent and differences are judged intolerable, while diversity is exposed, confronted, and handled with every available means. The results are then justified as Godly, and the condemned or executed are exposed as guilty and Godless.

In such a climate an institution, civil or religious, Christian or Muslim, creates yet another boundary or margin between itself and those deemed undesirable: *orthodox* is the hallmark of *us*, while *heretic* describes and defines *them*. The boundary is both clearly marked and maintained by excommunications or worse. If an institution becomes increasingly threatened, it can create other markers or boundaries, by threat or coercion. But a church concerned with definitions and margins, orthodoxy and heresy, will not only clarify the criteria for orthodoxy but also define other forms of deviance, such as superstition. The lines separating the three columns in the diagram (fig 4)[18] may be broken (as shown)

Heresy	**Orthodoxy**	**Superstition**
Heresy is whatever is judged to deviate from established criteria of orthodoxy	Boundaries separate "orthodoxy" from "heresy" or "superstition" and are created and patrolled by the agency with established authority control of sanctions	Superstition is belief or practice not consistent with established criteria of orthodoxy

Figure 4

[17] Ibid.

[18] This diagram is a modification of Michael Singleton, "Let the People Be," *Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin* 61 (1976): 4.

indicating a certain tolerance of heresy and/or superstition, but in times of direct confrontation and the defense of orthodoxy, they will be unbroken and patrolled, minimizing any ambiguity about boundaries or tolerance.

First, the controllers of orthodoxy identify a category and label (heresy/heretic or superstition), and then a line, determining and marking the limits of orthodoxy, is drawn. Whenever orthodoxy is under threat, it will defend its boundaries and sanction nonconformists. Boundaries and definitions are employed by every institution, culture, religion, and person, to different degrees; they are patrolled, policed, and reinforced in various ways. But one inevitable result is that the constructors or builders become immured in a prison of their own making, and suspicion and hostility increase rather than disappear.

Religions of the Book—those with written texts—are especially prone to this eventuality, since literate cultures codify and archive, define and objectify what they must not forget. In oral cultures, "structural amnesia" allows people to forget redundant information, something impossible where everything is written. So it is that Christians can refight battles from earlier centuries, when little of what they are fighting over is even known to most current combatants.

"As I Have Done, You Should Also Do" (John 13:13-15)

Reflecting on the challenge of diversity evokes an image of the bumblebee: by all rational and scientific laws it should be unable to generate enough speed for flight or to hover, its wings unable to support its body shape in flight. And yet it can and it does! And Galileo, accused by the Inquisition of holding the impossible proposition that the earth moved round the sun, muttered, almost to himself, "E pur, si muove" ("and yet it does move!") Things cannot be reduced to formulae; formulae cannot change reality. Diversity is a theoretical and practical problem for dialectical and dogmatic thinkers, but it happens. And that fact can be our motivation.

"Together Towards Life" addresses diversity, almost tangentially, and sometimes tentatively,[19] with Jesus as model. He seeks, embraces, and befriends the other in all their diversity. His life is the example we are called to follow. TTL speaks of *leitourgia* (not only formal worship, but "the work of the people," especially on behalf of others), *diakonia* (service, sacred or mundane, if undertaken with faith), *martyria* (life lived as a witness to the gospel), and *koinonia* (fellowship not only with people we know but also with those we have not yet met, something of which the early Christians were explicitly conscious). We already identified encounter, table fellowship, foot-washing, and boundary crossing, which cover much the same ground. But above all we must recommit ourselves to never doing separately what we can and should do together.

Is our behavior consistent with the life and teaching of Jesus? Even our own communities are sometimes divided against themselves, whether we consider the Great Western Schism or the many Reformations. Something has gone tragically wrong with Jesus' vision and Paul's articulation of his healing and reconciling ministry when our Christian witness loudly proclaims that we are not tolerant of diversity, even between ourselves.

Rodney Stark[20] believes that deep pluralism is quite compatible with equally deep religious conviction. We can, he reminds us, have civility, peace, diversity, monotheisms, conviction, and commitment. Is this an illusion, when such conditions also produce secularism and the corrosion and privatization of monotheistic commitments? As philosopher Charles Taylor says, religion has not disappeared, but it has perhaps become less rigidly dogmatic and rule-governed and more tolerant of the other. But we are also living with some of the greatest religious intolerance since the Crusades and the Religious Wars of Europe. The way ahead is anything but clear.

[19] TTL 36–38, 49, 85–86, 94.

[20] Stark, *One True God*, 96–98, 220–225.

Christians have a poor record, often crudely proselytizing (as TTL points out) rather than evangelizing in the spirit of Jesus. We must learn to promote honest diversity and leave a space for the God who created it. Either we live with diversity and respect the other or we antagonize those labeled "other" and risk destroying society. The Jesus option is clear and uncompromising: "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (John 13:34). Luke points Jesus' finger at each one of us: "I say to you that listen, 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:27-28). The litany continues: "Turn the other cheek; offer your tunic; give to everyone who asks" (cf. Luke 6:29-30). Talking the talk is no proof of discipleship. We know what Jesus said and did and what Scripture says. But blessed are those—more blessed indeed than his own mother, said Jesus—"who hear the word and obey it" (Luke 11:28); or "You repent, not by feeling bad but by thinking [and acting] differently," as Rudy Wiebe states it. We still have a long way to go. But what can be imagined can be realized. So, can we imagine a Jesus society of loving and mutually respectful diversity, and then try to live it?

CHAPTER NINE

"TRUE WORSHIP: IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH"

(John 4:23)

CAN WE GET BEYOND RELIGION?

The Problem with Religion

Ironically, more than a century after religion was diagnosed as terminally ill, and even pronounced dead by some diagnosticians, its spectral image—sometimes distorted by hatred and violence, but sometimes appearing sharply focused and beautiful—is apparent almost daily on television and in print; paradoxically, many traditional and devout believers who used to fear the demise of religion would now heartily welcome a religionless world. At a time when so many zealots (often caricatured as "religious" people of whatever faith or affiliation) claim "responsibility" for acts against humanity, while staunch believers exhibit intolerance and deep homophobia vis-à-vis fellow believers, how can any moderate person continue to defend, much less to espouse, religion?

It is now several years since the publication of a trio of very different yet oddly complementary books. With his eye-catching title, *The End of History and the Last Man*,[1] Francis Fukuyama argued

[1] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

that the great ideological struggles between communism and capitalism were finally over, that liberal democracies would now sweep the world, and that the future might be boring but would at least be peaceful. Less than five years later, however, Samuel Huntingdon's volatile *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*[2] presaged impending disaster occasioned by the implacable opposition of two religions: Christianity in its Western incarnation and Islam in its extreme and militant shape. Almost simultaneously, an edited volume argued that religion was precisely what was needed to underpin diplomatic initiatives[3] if there were to be any hope of peaceful coexistence. The first of those books paid no attention to religion, the second put a virulent strain of religion under the microscope, while the third identified a much more healthy variant and its capacity for universal good. While there is now consensus about the renewed significance of religion in the postmodern world, a still unresolved question is whether and to what degree healthy, peaceable, and tolerant religious forms can survive in a world in which the pathological, militant, and intolerant seem to have moved to center stage. The international response is far from diplomatic and overtly vindictive and destructive, yet latently at least, it purports to be righteously religious: civilized.

Institutionalized Religion

It has often been said, and with more than a grain of truth, that religion has been responsible for more evil and destruction in the world than any other agency. Yet many of religion's greatest critics have acknowledged that, properly embodied and articulated, it can be an unparalleled generator of the good and the best, while some of its staunchest defenders have offered superbly articulated

[2] Samuel P. Huntingdon, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

[3] Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds., *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

narratives that argue that the problem does not derive from authentic religion but from distorted "religionists."[4] In the contemporary world, when the darker side of institutionalized religion is apparent to everyone, what can be done to rehabilitate and portray that brighter profile? Is it possible, without becoming trite or superficial, to suggest how we ourselves—people with religious convictions yet also acutely aware of the dangerous potential of religious zealotry; who find "religious belonging" entirely compatible with social responsibility and individual integrity; who believe religious faith is not incompatible with scientific rationalism; and whose religious identity is also constitutive of our personal identity—might derive the very best from our own religious affiliation yet at the same time be attentive and receptive to people of quite different convictions but of equal and no less good will? Can we also appropriately affirm that religious faith is perfectly compatible with a considered and critical appraisal of one's own religious tradition and historic practice, and that dissent is not incompatible with active membership of a religious community? Or is that just wishful thinking, and is religion inevitably a divisive and destructive agent in human society, if not merely, as Karl Marx averred, "the sigh of the oppressed creature . . . the opium of the people"?

Religion—sometimes identified as belief and thought, or more blandly as a system that makes meaning and maintains moral values—is identified by cultural anthropologists as one of the social institutions (defined as "standardized modes of coactivity") that characterize every human society; others include kinship, economics, and politics. In this very general sense, religion is concerned with the numinous or the nonempirical, the "ultimate questions" of our origins and ends, and the virtues to be cultivated and vices to be avoided.

In every social institution, authority, power, and sanctions (both rewards and punishments) are critically important. While

[4] Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* (New York: Schocken Books, 2015).

power can be understood as the sheer capacity to act, authority is understood as legitimate or legitimated power, and the "legitimator" people invoke may be the Deity, Divine Right, Tradition, or precedent. But legitimators may sometimes be, quite simply, those who hold and wield greater power—in the shape of force, suasion, or the capacity to create fear—than anyone else in the vicinity. Every religion has its legitimators (good, bad, or indifferent) and its appeals to authority as ways of organizing and controlling its adherents.

Embedded Religion

Wherever found, the social institutions may appear more or less institutionalized or more or less *embedded*: the distinction is helpful and significant. Institutionalized social institutions are identifiable as relatively discrete, separate, set apart, or freestanding. They can be publicly identified in well-established and structured or patterned behavior. The intentional and constitutional separation of Church and State (that is, of the social institutions of religion and politics) in the United States is an example of freestanding or institutionalized institutions. But in many cultures, the social institutions are not entirely separate or separable: they are embedded. Not that they are so intertwined as to create social chaos, but many human activities can be best understood in analogical (both/and) rather than dialectical (either/or) terms, as we saw in chapter 6. Thus, marriage—undoubtedly a religious institution for many—is likewise and palpably an expression of both economic, political, and kinship behaviors. Marriage is both: embedded in the social fabric, not only institutionalized as a relatively freestanding social-legal institution.

In embedding rather than institutionalizing societies, "religion" is not separated but integrated with the rest of life and living—something that many people who consider themselves religious would argue must always be the case for all authentic religion. Nevertheless, there are many others (including some who are just as religiously committed) who subscribe to the

opposite view: they argue that religion is essentially a private affair, particularly in a post-Enlightenment world. But in many cultures and communities, social institutions are embedded, and millions of people perceive this to be an entirely normal state of affairs. Perhaps people more familiar with institutionalized religion can see this fact as a challenge to seek a more integrated way of living. In other words, their own religious behaviors might become more embedded in the very ground of their daily lives, experiences, and encounters. They might even better appreciate that, as social and religious beings, their own lives ought to reach out, encounter, and relate to others' lives, because religion is itself a deeply social institution. Then, their respective religions might actively encourage relationship building and seek dialogue rather than foster or even justify isolation or vilification.

Given the living nightmares generated by religious intolerance and the current hardening of religious attitudes into mutual suspicion and fear, misunderstanding, and intemperance, it seems useful to consider a possible yet rather simple way forward. What if we were consciously to "de-institutionalize" our respective religions, the more effectively to embed them in our own and others' daily lives? Would this not yield a harvest of peace, mutual enlightenment, and respect? This is, of course, what many people already endeavor to do, quietly and modestly. Yet many more seem not to have thought of it and remain dutifully pious but private, isolated, and rather ineffectual Christians.

Belief and Behavior

Though conventionally associated with each other, religion, belief, and faith refer to very distinguishable concepts and realities. Not every adherent of a religion can be said to believe or to hold a set of beliefs, beliefs are not necessarily codified, and not every believer is a person of faith. The object of belief is a proposition, while the object of faith is a person: one may *believe that* something is the case, but one has *faith in* someone. Religion, however (and this is also a criterion of true faith), is always mani-

fested in some form of behavioral response. We recall the Letter of James on this topic. The author says that people cannot legitimately claim to have faith unless they produce good works—the fruit or harvest of faith. The demons, he says, have faith, and they tremble! In short, "Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (see Jas 2:16-19).

One of the many possible implications is this: if formal beliefs or belief are not actually constitutive of true religion, maybe we can identify a more fundamental characteristic that is, and one that will characterize a wide variety of people from very different religious traditions. Then, perhaps, we might learn to build on what we hold in common rather that to lacerate each other on the sharp rocks of our mutual differences.

There is a widely held but naïve opinion that to qualify as a Catholic or a Jew, a Buddhist, a Jain, or a Zoroastrian one must cling to certain specific beliefs encoded as formulations or propositions, and that to dissent or deviate from them would be to put oneself beyond the religious pale. In an increasingly pluralistic world, people who subscribe to such a view will become imprisoned by their own thinking. They will act with either condescension or intolerance toward those they judge to hold different beliefs or none. These are strict "believers": they stand fast behind specific doctrinal formulae and defend their personal understandings and interpretations (for example, the "true" meaning of "I believe in the resurrection of the body"), not only against people of different religious denominations or persuasions, but also against the understanding of other members of their own denomination or community. Many such people perceive truth as a kind of object or commodity to be possessed: either one has it or one does not. In this all-or-nothing world, people play a zero-sum game; those who lack "(my) truth" have only "falsehood." We know some of the consequences of such a perception and approach—consequences produced "in God's name."

But religions are not absolutely discrete entities whose orthodoxy and separateness can be effectively policed and maintained—even though some central office be established or a guardian of

doctrine appointed. Not only are religions not empirically free-standing in this way, but such policing would be quite impracticable. Given the sheer variety of individual persons and their very different ways of assimilating information and experience, there will be, within any religious system, a relatively wide variety of understandings and responses.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith provided a helpful corrective to an ethnocentric or specifically Christian bias and carefully articulated an important insight as regards Christian tradition:

> [T]here has been a sustained and central emphasis on formulating the faith in prose. Much more attention in the Western world has been paid to the evolving content of this particular form of expression, rather than to the fact of it, which has tended to be taken rather uncritically and un-self-consciously for granted. The peculiarity of the place given to belief is a monumental matter whose importance and whose relative uniqueness must be appreciated. [U]nsuspecting Westerners have been liable to ask about a religious group other than their own, "What do they believe?," as though this were the primary question, and certainly a legitimate one.[5]

It evidently comes as a shock to many people that a set of beliefs—standardized or not—may not be a necessary component of a religion. Robert Bellah broadens the discussion:

> What I would call the "objectivist fallacy"—namely the confusion of *belief* and *religion*, found only in the religious traditions deeply influenced by Greek thought (Christianity and Islam) and almost completely missing in China and India—involves a fundamental misapprehension of the nature of religion, both the religion of the masses and of the cultural elite. . . . A great deal of influential religion, like

[5] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Bantam Books, 1964), 163; slightly abridged.

> Zen Buddhism for example, denied the value of any beliefs at all, and Taoism showed the same tendency.[6]

Religions are above all identifiable constellations of practices, with or without codified, propositional beliefs; although often referred to as *systems* of thought, feeling, and action, religions are quite often informal and nonsystematized. Yet adherents of a religion, though rather informal in some of their practices, can be readily identified by characteristic and common behaviors, which are neither nonrandom nor automatic responses. But there will always be some discrepancy between religious aspirations and actual behavior, since people can more easily articulate or defend the values or virtues they espouse than consistently manifest them in their behavior. We all fail to live up to our best aspirations and intentions.

A rather curious but near-universal human tendency is to be unable to think that our thinking is wrong: socialization processes combine to persuade us that we live in a more or less stable world of meaning; if anything, we tend to think of other people, rather than ourselves, as wrong. Certainly it would be impossible for us to negotiate the real world if everything were fluid and arbitrary, but there is a contrary danger: that our thinking becomes sclerotic or intransigent, prejudicial or resistant to other modes of thought. In a pluralistic world, such resistance can seriously inhibit communication. Moreover, to identify one's own way of thinking with absolute truth would be to commit a form of idolatry. Christians have a tendency to idolatry in this sense, though perhaps no more so than adherents of other religions, especially the monotheistic religions with their tendency to claim absolute truth. Again, Wilfred Cantwell Smith articulates the problem very well:

> For Christians to imagine that God has constructed Christianity, or the Church, or the like, rather than that [God] has inspired us to construct it, as [God] has inspired Muslims

[6] Robert Bellah, *Beyond Belief* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 220, 222.

> to construct what the world knows as Islam, or Hindus what is miscalled Hinduism, or inspired Bach to write the B Minor Mass—that is idolatry.[7]

Smith identifies this kind of idolatry as the error of looking at the windowpane itself instead of through it to God; this is to worship a creature or a created artifact instead of the Creator. Any religion can become an idol in this sense. But the God who reveals is to be experienced or encountered beyond the window of any particular religion. Therefore it is God's revelation that we need to identify, lest we idolize our religion or indeed our own image of God.

From Religion to Revelation

Religion, a social institution, is part of culture. But cultures cannot speak, for they have no voice; only the people who form the communities that constitute a culture are capable of speech. Consequently it would be vain for us to look to religions themselves to be dialogue partners; we should seek actual people, specifically people of faith. Since faith is much more than beliefs, whether systematized or not, we must look above all—as St. John Paul II emphasized in his 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*—to the behavior of people as an index of their real convictions. He calls it the "dialogue of life"—the mutual witnessing, cooperation, and indeed practical action that can enrich both parties and that is a duty of every authentically religious person of faith (RM 56, 57).

Every religious system functions to call its adherents not simply to belief but to a way of life, and not simply to behavior modification but to a relationship with the Other (God) and with God's creation in nature and in humanity. The way of life is intended to be consistent with the core religious values, often referred to as the "Golden Rule" or its equivalent—which is to

[7] Cantwell Smith, "Idolatry in Comparative Perspective," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 53–68, at 59.

be found clearly in Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and so on. In varying forms, this rule explicitly concerns the way people embody or live out what they understand as the core teaching of their respective religious system. Orthodoxy (appropriate and publicized religious principles) *should* generate orthopraxy (appropriate public and private behavior).

Yet problems arise whenever adherents attempt to internalize and apply what they understand to be the Great Truths, Revelation, or God's Will. This is because between the Great Intelligence, the Immutable Truth, or the Will of God, on the one hand, and the persons who attempt to understand or grasp it, on the other, lies an enormous and effectively unbridgeable divide: on one side is the infinite, and on the other is the human person, so palpably finite.

Vincent Donovan was a gifted distiller of theological ideas. Speaking not only of the Abrahamic religions but of the total range of human experience, he says simply and yet profoundly:

> Revelation is what God wants us to know and to do, and faith is the authentic response to that revelation from the midst of our human lives. Religion is what *we make* of that revelation of what God wants us to know and to do. People of every culture receive revelation from God, either in the fleshy tablets of their hearts or from the Word of God, and they can respond to it in faith. And when they do, people of other faiths can recognize it as an authentic response to revelation—whether it be the humble worship of the one God of Africa, or the beautiful reverence for life of the American Indian and the Hindus, or the admirable and total submission to God of the Muslims, or the joy and hope of Christian peoples. But they can also take that authentic revelation of God and make it into something frightening—their own exclusive religion. Muslims have done it. Jews have done it. Other non-Christians have done it. And Christians have done it, too.[8]

[8] Vincent Donovan, *The Church in the Midst of Creation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 85. Italics in the original.

Given our natural curiosity and desire to understand, control, and define, there will always be a tendency to reduce revelation (God's expansive gift) to religion (our current understanding) rather than to expand our religion to better reflect God's revelation. Religions seek clear, bounded answers and attempt to quantify, reduce, set limits, and control. But revelation opens us up for endless possibilities; it expands our horizons and calls us beyond rules and laws to love. Donovan shows that Jesus was "plagued with religious questions" by people caught within a legalistic mind-set. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17). "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). "How often should I forgive?" (Matt 18:21). "Which commandment is the first of all?" (Mark 12:28). "Who is the greatest?" (Matt 18:1). These and other religious questions seek unambiguous answers, but Jesus answers none of them. Instead, in every single case, he calls people to be imaginative rather than coldly rational, loving rather than narrowly legalistic, and open rather than firmly closed.

> Religion comes from inside us. Revelation comes from outside us. Religion stabilizes and reassures us. Revelation destabilizes and disturbs us. Revelation calls into question everything solid and taken for granted. Religion so often tries to use God as a means to a human end. It calls on God to bless every conceivable project.[9]

Jesus turns people from the simple performance of deeds and toward persons, toward human need, toward possibilities, and toward a God's-eye view of reality and the world. His is a view shaped by compassion and love. Characterizing certain developments in institutional Christianity as (God's) revelation in contrast to (humanity's) religion, Donovan identifies the Last Supper and the commands to preach the gospel and forgive sins as revelation and the Roman Rite Mass, the restriction of preaching to the clergy, and the restriction of forgiveness to the sacrament of

[9] Ibid., 88.

reconciliation as religion. The charisms of leadership and presiding over the community, duly discerned by the church, are revelation; the Catholic priesthood, celibate and male, is religion.[10] And so on. But Pope Francis is putting his formidable energy in challenging the church to rethink religion and be more open to God's amazing revelation. Not surprisingly, he is generating opposition from some. He says, "We are used to formulas, black and white, but not the gray of daily life. And what counts is life, not the formulas." And addressing some of the newer religious orders, he says this: "Some are really good and do things seriously; others are born not from a charism of the Holy Spirit, but human charisma. Some are 'restorationist'; they seem to provide safety and instead they offer only rigidity."[11] It is trenchant, fearless, and identifies the danger of religion without revelation.

Donovan for his part concludes that a church that reaches out, beyond its boundaries (not to proselytize but to encounter and to love[12]), is a church of revelation. A church led by the Spirit, hungry for justice, trusting in God's providence and seeking the God of Jesus is revelation. But a church that tends to speak for the Spirit, is content with legalism, maintains control, or is complacent in its certainties would remain a religious institution rather than a sacrament of God's revelation.

The Dignity of Difference

The so-called religions of the book have scriptures and commentaries available for public access. All adherents of such religious systems are faced—whether conscious of this fact or not—with the temptation to equate the truth with their own perceptions or interpretations and then to judge or condemn other

[10] Ibid., 92.

[11] Pope Francis, addressing the Union of Superiors General, November 26, 2016. *National Catholic Reporter*, February 9, 2017. www.ncronline.org.

[12] In the article quoted above, Pope Benedict XVI is quoted as saying, in a timely fashion, given our sometimes sad and scandalous history, "the church does not grow by proselytizing but by attraction."

religious perceptions or interpretations, and even to attempt to eradicate by lethal force those who hold them. Time and again, competing monotheisms have exposed the scandal of religions that compromise the very principles of truth and justice on which they stand. But when monotheisms peacefully coexist—as they have at various times in history—God is praised and each religion contributes to authentic human development. One of the most powerful examples of religious coexistence, tolerance, and cooperation was to be found during the Middle Ages, from Arabia to Iberia, when for long periods between the seventh and fifteenth centuries, Jews, Muslims, and Christians respected and were mutually enriched by each other's differences, before mutual suspicion metastasized into pogrom, Inquisition, and expulsion. But when they come into conflict—as they frequently have, to their shame—each tends to justify its own actions as Godly, though the outcome is invariably scandalously ungodly.

Jonathan Sacks, chief rabbi of Great Britain, has given serious thought to this issue as it has become increasingly apparent in the contemporary world. He would concur with Donovan that religion often excludes,[13] but he avers that, in principle, monotheism is not only quite compatible with varieties of faith but does not necessarily require that all adherents or people of faith share an identical understanding of truth. In Donovan's terms, he is suggesting that since God's revelation is so much more than any religious system can grasp, multiple partial understandings of who God is and what God asks are quite compatible with human multiplicity and with the very different contexts in which humanity must inevitably try to grasp what it can of divine revelation. As do Cantwell Smith, Donovan, and St. John Paul II, so too Rabbi Sacks opens for us a way forward. He rejects "universalism" as the way the human mind seeks to reduce God's creation of multiformity and multiplicity (diversity) to singularity: to assume that there can only be one, single, universal religious interpretation

[13] Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London: Continuum, 2002), 46.

of God's designs and God's truth. But he explains that Judaism is a particular and indeed unique kind of monotheistic faith. It is a "particularist monotheism." He explains:

> It believes in one God but not in one religion, one truth. The God of Abraham is the God of all mankind, but the faith of Abraham is not the faith of all mankind. Biblical monotheism is not the idea that there is one God and therefore one truth, one faith, one way of life. On the contrary, it is the idea that unity creates diversity. God is universal; religions are particular. Religion is the translation of God into a particular language, and thus into the life of a community of faith. No single faith is or should be the faith of all humanity. Only such a narrative would lead us to see the presence of God in people of other faiths. We serve God, author of diversity, by respecting diversity.[14]

This is evidently not the common Christian understanding; but the idea certainly challenges everyone to a dialogue of mutual respect, which Christians have signally failed to do far too often. Humanity is one, but we are all different. Human beings are all the same, yet each of us is unique. There is no universal language, though language itself is universal. And there is not, nor need there be, a single universal religion. To promote such a thing has always brought violence. Yet those who do not share my (or your) point of view, perspective, or religion do not thereby cease to share my (or your) humanity. We are, each and all of us, made in God's image. It is by encounter, mutual respect, and living the Golden Rule that we are all enriched by the God who reveals aspects of divinity in every human person. The dignity of difference is a notion for us to ponder and work with. When we truly understand it and learn its lessons, we will have moved beyond doctrinaire religion and intolerance of the Other, beyond clinging fiercely to our beliefs and fighting with those of others,

[14] Ibid., 50–56.

to a glimpse of God's revelation that inspires and ignites our faith and thereby enlightens and gives hope to us all.

The End Is the Beginning

People, naturally curious, have questions. And questions beg for answers. But as Vincent Donovan reminded us, Jesus never answered a particular kind of question: the one that almost demands, not only an answer, but a definitive, unequivocal answer: "How often [exactly]?" "Why [precisely]?" "When [specifically]?" Yet people of faith, naturally curious and not necessarily credulous, sometimes find it difficult to withhold their questions. Jesus famously said, "Ask, and it will be given you" (Matt 7:7), but he never specified what exactly would be given or when. As every child discovers, the provisional answer to one question always generates other questions. The answer to the question "why?" simply provokes another question: another "why?"

At the heart of our faith is mystery: the mystery that is God. Some people will never tire of seeking God. But the way to find and encounter God is by faith—the God-given gift that enables us to believe without seeing, to accept without totally comprehending. Faith is based on the trust we have in the person in whom we believe. As St. Paul famously declared: "I know in whom I have believed" (2 Tim 1:12; in the Vulgate: *scio cui credidi*). The person of faith tries to accept that we are not omniscient and we will neither have nor understand all the answers. But rather than become totally frustrated or stop asking, seeking, and knocking, we can try to assimilate the way of Jesus, which is to point beyond religious formulations, definitions, and final answers to the possibilities that open up when we open ourselves up to God. This simply means that we strive not to reduce, to tame, to control the truth but to expand our religious horizons, to seek multiple possibilities, and to never imagine that we have done enough: there is always more to know, to see, and to imagine than we will ever know, see, or imagine. This is to acknowledge that we cannot but see, as the King James Bible has it, "through a glass,

darkly." It is to live, not within the strictures of a container labeled "religion," but under the open and infinite canopy of God's continuing revelation.

As T. S. Eliot writes,

> We shall not cease from exploration,
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time[15]

And perhaps somewhat less familiar:

> Words strain,
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden . . .
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still.[16]

But meanwhile, as we continue on our way and on the Way of Jesus, we can try, while cherishing the comforts religion attempts to offer, to remain open and childlike before the ongoing and boundless revelation of God, lest we take refuge behind formulae and dogmatism, but remain trusting risk-takers and travelers on the Way that leads us home.

[15] T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding."
[16] T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, "Burnt Norton."

CHAPTER TEN

"LET US GO ELSEWHERE: THAT IS WHY I CAME"

(Mark 1:38)

FAITH, CULTURE, MOVEMENT, AND MISSION

Jesus' Job Description

The morning after Jesus had healed Peter's mother-in-law, he rose early and went away to pray. This is time for restoring his depleted spiritual energy. Whenever he encountered people and performed "works of power" his energy was drained and he needed to be reenergized through his encounter with his *Abba*. On that particular morning, Peter followed him, disturbed him at prayer, and made him a proposition. It was as if Peter wanted to become Jesus' agent or manager, because he saw how much in demand Jesus was increasingly becoming. But Jesus wanted none of the trappings of celebrity. Various gospel translations tell us that Jesus said, "Let us go elsewhere, to the neighboring country towns" (JB), "on to the neighboring towns" (NRSV), "somewhere else to the towns nearby" (NASB),[1] and so on.

Jesus explains to Peter exactly why: "so that I may proclaim the message" (NRSV); "so that I can preach there too" (JB). And he concludes, "for that is what I came out to do" (NRSV);

[1] Jerusalem Bible (JB); New American Standard Bible (NASB); New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

"because that is why I came" (JB). Jesus has a very clear understanding of his mission of continuous itinerant ministry. As the days pass, he will encounter, not only people like himself (*us*), but also people very different from himself (*them*). He will be crossing boundaries and margins, encountering a wide range of people in the context of their own life circumstances and social contexts.

This chapter attempts to identify the relationship between faith and culture and to indicate how Jesus approaches the challenge—in relation to people like the Samaritan woman (John 4), the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5), or the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7)—and how we ourselves might better appreciate the relationship between a person's faith and his or her culture and context. Without such awareness, we might fail to understand how Jesus' mission encounters real people. Unless we do likewise, we might alienate the very people we want to encounter.

Shaped, Humanized, and Limited by Culture

Ethnicity, largely a matter of genetics and *nature*, describes *who we are*; culture, largely a matter of socialization and *nurture*, accounts for *what, how, and why we do* what we do. Among its myriad features and functions, culture locates us as members of a particular social group: a tribe or nation, a religion or profession, a monastery or penitentiary. There are differences and similarities between persons and subcultures within every culture: groups with distinctive or identifiable patterns of behavior or belief. There is no such thing as a person without culture. Each of the thousands of different cultures and subcultures in the world is a shaper of language and meaning and an interpreter of reality and experience. Culture is participative and relational. As one person astutely affirmed, "Nothing living is self-contained; if there were such a thing as an unrelated individual, none of us would know it."[2] Cultures are not random mutations of humanity but

[2] Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 36, Supplementary (1981): 50.

marvelous—though imperfect—transformations of what social human beings are and can become. Cultures have a vital function in creating and maintaining human groups in all their versatility. But transformation—the process of changing from being a helpless baby into a mature adult—is necessary.

Because spirituality and faith are influenced by the historical and geographical features of culture, all their expressions or manifestations are contextual and therefore partial and limited. Faith can only be expressed culturally: through people's cultural forms and conventions, and the way they negotiate their daily lives. It is meaningless to think of faith in the abstract, without its particular cultural expression. So, there are as many ways of being religious as there are cultures and individuals. Human beings are all different, and none of us can be reduced to a type or standard or conformed to another person's example or expectations. Yet, given our uniqueness and individuality, we are, at a fundamental level, all the same. This is the great human paradox: different ethnically, culturally, and individually, we share a common humanity. Anthropologically, we are a single human race. But in and through (rather than despite) our differences, we can bear daily witness to our values and help each other to live accordingly, in order to build a more just and fraternal society.[3] Sadly, we have hardly learned to use our differences collaboratively, for culture—and religion—tends to make us competitive when we could collaborate and critical when we could be complimentary.

Theologically, our common factor as Christians is our striving to be rooted in Christ and united to him, but always in our various cultural, linguistic, and individual social locations. It is important that we tease out some of the implications of this social fact and to understand how our very differences help us to respond in complementary ways to God's initiative, by committing us to the *missio Dei*—God's eternal mission, incarnated and

[3] This is the thesis of Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London: Continuum, 2002).

rooted in Jesus, and extended by his invitation to all those who are baptized, called, and sent in his name.

Until recently, and in many places still, the significance of culture in the shaping and articulation of people's lived spirituality was seriously underestimated. One example: religious communities[4] might accept candidates from various cultures, but so long as the directors of formation originated from the founder's culture or a global linguistic bloc, generations of new religious were simply assimilated into a dominant culture or its *modus operandi*. Not only did this seriously reduce the possibility of encouraging religious life to be truly rooted—and thus able to flourish—in multiple indigenous forms, it stunted the healthy growth of generations of religious who were expected to think, dress, eat, pray, and worship in alien cultural forms. But if authentic Christian spirituality can be described as "a way of being in the world with God," then, given the *many* cultural ways in which people live, the *many* worlds they inhabit, and the *many* understandings and experiences of God that exist, Christian spirituality should be able to find authentic expression in many different forms yet united by a common identifiable core: discipleship of Jesus.

Although there have been attempts to respect and accommodate a plurality of forms of living one's faith, they often seem to be in competition rather than contributing to a composite picture whose many elements are mutually compatible and relevant. This would produce *intercultural*[5] (as distinct from *multicultural*) living, which requires a solid commitment on the part of every community member to transplant themselves from the relative comfort of their own cultural home and become dis-placed, "out of place"—or, like Jesus, a stranger—for the sake of the realm of God. Much easier is *multicultural* living, which often amounts to no more than people of different cultures living under the same

[4] Religious communities are one example, but in a globalized, multicultural world, the point has wider relevance.

[5] For a systematic approach to intercultural living, see Anthony Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015).

roof (living together separately), while each person clings to his or her own cultural identity and idiosyncrasies, not being stretched and called to conversion by the demands of a Gospel of radical inclusion and radical equality.

If, in a pluralistic society, faith-filled living has a future and missional Christianity[6] is to remain vibrant, it can only be through a commitment to *intercultural* living. But only if we are rooted in Christ, individually and collectively, will we be able to appreciate the dignity of difference and show the resilience required for transforming the world. The alternative is stress-produced burnout and fatigue or surrender due to discouragement or apparent failure.

Rooted in Culture, Rooted in Christ

In order to thrive, every cultural community must ensure that its new members are solidly rooted through the processes of socialization (or enculturation). The newborn child, rootless and cultureless, thereby becomes part of a preexisting group: nuclear and extended family, and broader kindred and neighbors. Gradually the individual matures into a (re)productive adult and subsequently an elder/ancestor. Successful (and culture-specific) socialization—primary (up to the age of reason), secondary (into early adulthood), and tertiary (ongoing, through maturity to age)—is the measure of the morally responsible and accountable adult member of society. But while primary and secondary socialization determine the quality of a person's social rootedness, adaptive skills and maturity will become manifest only in the course of tertiary or ongoing socialization. A person's ability to operate in an initially unfamiliar cross-cultural situation—to produce branch, blossom, and fruit—depends significantly on that person's sense of self. A strong, stable, culturally well-rooted person will be significantly better equipped to deal with multiplex relationships in adulthood than one whose roots

[6] See chap. 3.

have failed to grow or withered due to poor socialization. Hence the Socratic imperative: first, "know thyself." Only then can we encounter and learn from others. Research and experience show that the more one is rooted in one's primary culture, the more readily one is subsequently able to move beyond its confines and engage with people of other cultures without compromising personal integrity. Only if we are rooted in Christ can we later leave home to go in pilgrimage wherever the paths of discipleship should lead. To undertake such a pilgrimage, however, we must be both discriminating and open to alternatives. With a strong moral core and openness to a "dialogue of life"[7] with the otherness of the other, it will be possible for us to be converted and perhaps become agents of authentic transformation.

Jesus: Rooted in Culture, Rooted in God

Human beings communicate culturally, primarily through our bodies. We do not merely *have* bodies but *are embodied*; there is no other way to be human. But before we can communicate, we must be located and formed culturally, since communication is body-mediated through specific languages and cultural symbolizations. A poorly rooted personality with an inadequate grasp of language will communicate poorly. Jesus was rooted both in his culture and in his relationships: with his *Abba* and his disciples. Fully divine and fully human, he communicated *himself.* Those called and sent in his name must learn to do likewise.

In chapter 2, we distinguished academic knowledge (*knowing about*) and apprentice knowledge (*actually knowing*). Theology or catechesis is learning *about* Jesus, while true Christian spirituality is developing a relationship with God, which is what Jesus offers. Here

[7] This is from the 1990 encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio.* His reference to "people of different religions" surely applies to fellow Christians. Through "the dialogue of life" people "bear witness before each other in daily life to their own human and spiritual values, and help each other to live according to those values in order to build a more just and fraternal society" (par. 57).

is a superb passage from Vatican II that identifies apprentice knowledge explicitly: "The catechumenate is not merely an exposition of dogmatic truths and norms of morality, but a period of formation in the entire Christian life, an apprenticeship of suitable duration, during which the disciples will be joined to Christ their teacher."[8]

So we need two kinds of socialization or enculturation: into our own primary culture and into the Christian faith. Then we will be doubly rooted. Then our faith will be *inculturated*;[9] only then will we be examples of lived Christianity, capable of mutual enrichment as missional Christians.

Pedro Arrupe, SJ, defined inculturation as "the incarnation of the Christian life and Christian message in a particular cultural context, such that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (which would only be superficial adaptation), but becomes a principle that animates, directs, and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation."[10]

Pope Paul VI insisted that "what matters is to evangelize cultures (not in a purely decorative way as it were by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth, and right to their very roots)."[11] Specifically, "Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into account the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life."[12]

[8] Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes* [AG]), par. 14.

[9] "Enculturation" (socialization) is a sociological term. "Inculturation" is theological: it describes *lived faith* or the expression of our relationship with God through virtuous living. Liturgical adaptation alone is acculturation (incorporating elements of another culture). When it bears fruit in people's lives, the *faith* has been inculturated.

[10] Pedro Arrupe, "Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation," in *Other Apostolates Today: Selected Letters and Addresses of Pedro Arrupe, SJ*, ed. J. Aixala, vol. 3 (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1981), 172–81.

[11] Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), par. 20.

[12] Ibid., par. 63.

Again, of critical importance: "Only a church aware of her universality and show[ing] that she is in fact universal is capable of having a message that can be heard by all, regardless of regional frontiers [culture]. Legitimate attention to individual churches cannot fail to enrich the church. Such attention is indispensable and urgent. It responds to the very deep aspirations of peoples and human communities to find their identity ever more clearly."[13]

Finally, St. Paul's prayer is that "[God] grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love" (Eph 3:16-18).

These powerful expressions identify the importance of the roots of both culture and faith and require us to respect people's cultural identity as the only way they can live out their faith. But, while culture is undoubtedly important, our life's deeper purpose is to experience a relationship. As St. Paul says, "To know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:19) in order to serve God's mission. How we do that is by being transformed or converted.

Transformation: Challenge and Possibility

Transformation is an immensely significant process, so perhaps we should consider whether it is too large and weighty for our feeble shoulders. We can be both subject and object of transformation. As subject, we can transform something or someone: a wilderness into a garden, or people's behavior by persuasion or coercion. A weak and insignificant early Christianity transformed the mighty Roman Empire into the powerful post-imperial Christendom, by "flattery and battery."[14] A better approach would be to consider transformation theologically as the outcome of God's grace working on human nature-culture. Here, the Holy

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ramsey McMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 119.

Spirit is the subject, inspirer, and transformer: by ourselves we can do nothing (John 15:5). But unless we are people of personal integrity and virtue, grace has very little to work with. So we can also consider ourselves as recipients: we can become transformed. Saint Paul told the Romans not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed (Rom 12:2), and he assured the Corinthians that if they remained faithful they would all be transformed (1 Cor 15:52). How might we proceed?

Far from being a miraculous or magical event, transformation is a rule-governed process. Unfortunately, the word "transformation" is often used as though it can happen by *fiat* or fantasy. Transformation is *radical change*: fundamental, foundational, and reaching down to the roots. It is an immensely powerful process of conversion whereby an original reality becomes something new, staggeringly different, and often unrecognizable. The process may be gradual or virtually instantaneous, but critically, the new reality *is always traceable to the original condition or state.* At 211 degrees Fahrenheit (99.3 degrees Celsius), water is very hot indeed, but when the heat increases by a single degree (212°F = 100°C), it boils and is transformed into steam. Steam can power a heavy locomotive, but hot water can do no such thing! Again, by nuclear fission plutonium was transformed into the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima. Transformation can change the world—literally. It can also change people radically, like a self-confessed lazy religious called Teresa who was transformed by God's grace and her own response into the great Spanish mystic, St. Teresa of Avila.

But there is a two-part corollary. First, if we consider only the initial reality—water, plutonium, or a young woman—its final outcome is by no means clear: water can also be transformed into ice, plutonium into fuel-producing electricity, or one young Spanish Teresa might become a famous opera singer, Teresa Berganza. Or we can begin with the outcome, working back from the transformed reality: Hitler, Pol Pot, Michelangelo, Francis, or Clare, and work backwards from there. We can better understand their endpoint by tracing their earlier developmental stages. A

particular baby may grow up to become Martin Luther or Martin Luther King, and if we scrutinize each life we can understand how it was gradually transformed. But neither Martin could be transformed into an angel or a devil, a woman or a child, because that would not be within the laws of nature. For us, the implications are stark: no stone will ever be transformed into bread, no lie will ever produce truth, no violence will ever give birth to peace—and no Christian community or individual without tenacious faith, abiding hope, and love beyond death will ever be transformed and bear fruit that can become the harvest of the realm of God.

Transformations—linguistic, musical, architectural, or moral—are governed by rules rather than random. So what might we legitimately hope for, and what is out of the question? Everything depends on the load-bearing capacity of our foundations, on our accumulating wisdom and virtue, and on the actual practice of our lives. But some things are certain: no wishful thinking can transform a fairy-tale frog into a prince or a wicked stepmother into a trustworthy woman, and no pious aspirations can transform individuals into disciples hungry and thirsty for God's justice, or prophetic witnesses to God's mission and God's realm. Transformation is not magic, but it is mandatory if these dry bones are to live. If it is to be more than a slogan, it will be because God's Spirit has rekindled the fire. The Spirit can do this only if we become fuel for the flame.

God-Rooted, Spirit-Fired, World-Transforming

This heading may sound unrealistic, more pretentious than practicable, but it articulates God's plan for us and our own best hopes: we aspire to be rooted in God, ignited by the Spirit, commissioned as transformed transformers. So what might affect God's plans and our hopes? Here are three possibilities.

The first may be found within. Are we really loyal followers of Jesus if our lives are ensured and assured, safe between extreme comfort and total destitution? In a world polarized by poverty and riches, freedom and repression, egoism and altruism, have

we found a middle way: neither frozen nor burnt but maybe lukewarm; neither slaves nor libertines but cushioned by entitlements; not entirely self-centered but far from heroic? Are we virtually anonymous Christians and undistinguished disciples? Obscured or illegible signs help nobody.

The second thing affecting God's plans and our hopes might be contemporary scandals rocking the church: abuse of authority or sexuality, lack of accountability or due process, witch-hunting of theologians and opinionated women, and the use of threat and excommunication. Meanwhile, some ecclesiastics act like princes blatantly flouting the law, while others close ranks to protect their front, sides, and rear. Pope Francis said bluntly, "There is corruption in the Vatican. You don't need to become a cardinal to think of yourself as a prince! It is enough to be clerical. This is what is worst in the organization of the church."[15] It is also the cause of deep scandal and disillusionment. Meanwhile, churches in the global north continue to close and the Christian community hemorrhages thousands of members, as earnest Catholics are excluded from the Eucharist in the name of Jesus, who promoted a community of radical inclusion and radical forgiveness. If the institutional church were an individual, a physician would be powerless to help without the subject's willingness to address the self-destructive addictions, bad habits and antisocial behaviors compromising the patient's health. So the questions come back to us as individuals: who do we think we are? Can we ever transform the world? What happened to the fire?

And third, an extension of the first possibility is that we do not have the Christ-roots of Romero, the compassion of Clare, the fire of Francis, or the generous spirit of Jesus. An online posting in 2017, honoring Sr. Dorothy Stang, SNDdeN, murdered in 2005, remarked that people were saying she was not buried but "planted in Brazil's soil." Brazil's ambassador extended the metaphor, referring to legislation that would immediately benefit

[15] Pope Francis's address to Superiors' General, reported in *National Catholic Reporter* (February 9, 2017).

poor farmers, by saying that "her seeds already have shoots."[16] This should be true of us all. But we do not fit the profile of the prophet, and we have such a long way to go before we are transformed to reflect the face of Jesus. So what might still be possible before death interrupts our good intentions?

Living Faith Culturally

Every culture contains both sin and grace; and to be culturally well rooted and sufficiently attuned to other cultures is to be able both to criticize and to affirm culture in the light of the Gospel. This is what Jesus did. But not content merely to do so from a lofty distance, his indiscriminate compassion led him intentionally to encounter the other as he incarnated the *missio Dei*—bringing it literally down to earth—historically and geographically in Galilee and its environs.

Like Jesus, we can only live out our faith as actual people in a specific context. Personal transformation is always dependent on context. There are no generic people: every person is particular. Jesus loves particular people, one by one, in the concrete reality of their culture, of which their faith (strong, weak, faltering, or failed) is a feature. His preaching is not abstract but addressed to "those with ears to hear," then and now.

Summarizing the challenge and impact of Jesus, a biblical scholar says this:

> God's saving intervention in the person of Jesus of Nazareth became part of a religious practice, a culture, and a history, but that culture, history, and religion were assumed and transformed by his life, teaching, death and resurrection. [His] "life story" broke through the expectations and limitations [the people's] religion, culture and history would have preferred to impose on him.
>
> Who Jesus Christ is, and what he asks of his followers, cannot be "controlled" or "contained" by *any* religion, *any*

[16] "Editorial," *National Catholic Reporter* (February 12, 2005).

> culture, or *any* history. He calls us to transform our particular cultures by defying sin which makes our ways and our absolutes the shapers of our destiny. Jesus' followers will strive—against all the tendencies of human culture and history to settle for what has been achieved—to transform their particular cultures as Jesus strove to transform his. As his life story tells us, it will cost no less than everything.[17]

Because Francis of Assisi was firmly rooted in his cultural context and in God, he could criticize and affirm other people and their culture. Sadly, political correctness within his community and in Rome muffled his prophetic action. The author of *The Saint and the Sultan* reappraises Francis's famous 1219 visit to Sultan Malik al-Kamil:

> The true story of Francis, the sultan, and their peaceful exchange was buried. It did not serve the purposes of popes who continued to drum up support for a string of ill-fated crusades. Nor did it fit the needs of Francis' order. Francis' thirst for peace and the sultan's noble treatment of the Crusaders were downplayed and forgotten. But Francis thought Muslims could best be approached with love . . . [and] tried to stop the Crusaders from heading into a disastrous battle. Francis' goal from the start was simply to live the gospels. Two passages stand out in his writings: "love your enemies" (Matt 5:44), and "blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt 5:9). But not once did any of [his] early biographers allude to these lines of scripture that meant so much to him.[18]

Because it is never too late for any of us, consider Oscar Romero, who experienced a call to transformation late in life. But the seeds were there, long-planted if apparently dormant. Grace

[17] Francis J. Moloney, *"A Hard Saying": The Gospel and Culture* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 175. Underlining added; everything else is author's emphasis.

[18] Quotations from Paul Moses, *The Saint and the Sultan: The Crusades, Islam, and Francis of Assisi's Mission of Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 197–212.

and his cooperation produced abundance that is still being harvested. Jon Sobrino explains the archbishop's strategy and tactics:

> His homilies were unparalleled . . . and they reached everyone. This . . . proceeded from serious biblical reflection before giving a homily that would truly bring light to shine on the country's reality. It was reflected in the credibility of his words. Monseñor Romero's hope was to evangelize the structure of society—something seldom even considered these days. He wanted to change the economic and political infrastructure, the legal institutions, the health care and the media. He also wanted to evangelize the ecclesial infrastructure, with its curia, parishes, religious congregations, educational institutions and internal politics. He did not allow himself to be walled up in a sacristy, a pastoral letter, or a mission with limited horizons. He accomplished all this with an exceptional creativity that combined real closeness with people in their communities. He wanted to evangelize the country in its entirety—everyone: individuals, social groups and infrastructures—where there was poverty and injustice but also hope, solidarity, faithfulness and martyrdom. There is a deficit of such thinking in the church today.[19]

Noticeable here is Romero's rootedness in his context; he identified the sin and the grace, leading and inspiring as much as challenging and condemning. His hope was not modest! This was no daydreamer but a visionary. Sadly, the pope, John Paul II, was not impressed with this challenge to the church. Who, then, was the prophet?

Dying Embers, Roaring Fire

Fire has dominated the imagery of renewal in the church and its members, from the day of Pentecost when the apostles

[19] Jon Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 174–75. Slightly compressed.

were enflamed with the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4) to Paul's advice to Timothy: "rekindle the gift of God within you" (2 Tim 1:6, JB). Since fire evokes the Holy Spirit, we might profitably consider other references.

At his own episcopal ordination, Joseph Ratzinger said this: "We all long for a Pentecostal Church, a Church in which the Spirit rules and not the letter, a Church in which understanding breaks down the fences we erect against each other. We are impatient with a Church that seems so un-Pentecostal, so narrow and fearful."[20] That was more than forty years ago and his hopes were clearly unrealized. Twenty years later, Joan Chittister wrote an astonishingly challenging, encouraging, and hopeful book, *The Fire in These Ashes*,[21] in which she urged us to rake the ashes to fan the fire beneath. But in 2012, Cardinal Martini somberly evoked Karl Rahner's image of embers hidden under the ash, saying, "I see the church today as so much ash under the embers that often I'm hit with a sense of impotence. How can we liberate the embers, and reinvigorate the fire?"[22] And a few weeks later, a Swiss abbot took up the theme, deploring the lack of courage, vision, and creativity in today's Church—echoing Archbishop Ratzinger and exclaiming, "What's missing is the fire!"[23] Then, very suddenly, the Holy Spirit gave us Pope Francis.

The problem is that we want transformation without personal conversion and transformation. We want others to do something but are unwilling to be disciples like Romero or Stang. The rules of transformation will teach us what might, and what cannot, be

[20] Quoted by J. J. Hughes in *The Tablet* (March 19, 2007): 23. The episcopal ordination was on Pentecost 1977.

[21] Joan Chittister, *The Fire in These Ashes: A Spirituality of Contemporary Religious Life* (St. Louis, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1996).

[22] John Allen, Final Interview with Cardinal Martini, *National Catholic Reporter* (September 4, 2012); http://ncronline.org/print/blogs/ncr-today/translated-final-interview-martini.

[23] Christa Pongratz-Lippitt, "Swiss Abbot Makes Fiery Appeal for Church Reform," *National Catholic Reporter* (December 20, 2012); http://ncronline.org/print/news/global/swiss-abbott-makes-fiery-appeal-church-reform.

done. No amount of coal will ever produce fire. Without a spark, a flame, a fire, it may glisten and look impressive, but it remains cold and impotent.

A final story from the desert fathers and mothers: Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph, and said, "As far as I can, I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace as far as I can, and I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?" The old man stood up and stretched his hands toward heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire, and he said: "If you will, you can become all flame."

PART 3

MODELS OF AND MODELS FOR DISCIPLESHIP TODAY

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"IT IS NOT YOU WHO SPEAK, BUT THE HOLY SPIRIT"

(Mark 13:11)

A CALL TO PRUDENT, RISK-TAKING DISCIPLESHIP

"Give an Account for the Hope That Is within You" (1 Pet 3:15; NASB)

Reflecting on faithful discipleship brings to mind another line from T. S. Eliot: "In a world of fugitives, the person taking the opposite direction will appear to be running away."[1] It captures an intrinsic aspect of discipleship. Disciples should not be absolutely invisible in a moving crowd but subtly identifiable by their *habitus*—the attitude or style shaped by faith and determining a course of action and a direction somewhat different from most people's. Furthermore, they must be quite clear they are not running away but joyfully and audaciously heading toward a worthy, life-giving goal. Direct influence on the crowd may seem minimal, but loyalty to God, expressed in outreach to God's needy and marginalized people should be steadfast. Witness may

[1] T. S. Eliot, *The Family Reunion* (1939).

be subtle but must be clear; illegible writing or faded signs are of neither use nor ornament.

The only question worth asking—if we believe that God will not be without witnesses in the future as in the past—is whether we are running, standing still, twitching nervously, or just waiting for death. So where do we find, or seek, the energy and focus to live faithfully, not only for ourselves or our circle, but for those Jesus calls "the poor" and society labels "nobodies"?

Today's world cries out for signs of hope but often confuses hope's rare currency with the counterfeit coin of naïve optimism. Optimism and nostalgia are not Christian virtues, but hope is a Christian hallmark, founded on God's indefectible faithfulness. With hope already in our hearts, we look to redirect it outward and focus it, not on personal survival, but on God's mission and God's realm. Where there's hope, there's life; without hope, bleak despair. What ultimately matters, as Merton reminded us, is not survival but prophecy, which can flourish only in the fertile ground of hope. But "prophecy" is a weighty word that many people would never apply to themselves, for vainglorious prophecy is the sound of self-indulgent bombast. But we can and must hope and be steadfast champions of the vision of Jesus and his hunger for justice.

Wellspring of Hope, Sustainer of Prophecy

Every Sunday we affirm our belief that "God has spoken through the prophets," and the Fourth Eucharistic Prayer says that "through the prophets [God] taught us to hope for salvation." Again, prophecy and hope. So where exactly are these prophets, or are they just assorted dead heroes? And where is the hope, or has it been diluted by optimism or curdled by nostalgia? If we are what we claim to be, Christ's body on earth, some prophets *must be* nearby. But we can muzzle or kill them as effectively as our ancestors did. Affliction by a thousand snide remarks, slow death by cynicism, or social death by shunning are equally effective ways, if not actually to kill, then surely to maim, mute, and

marginalize irksome or threatening people. Then the comfortable and complacent can sleep soundly, while, silently and stealthily, necrotic tissue invades and debilitates the Body of Christ.

Lest talk of prophecy give us inflated ideas, we should know that the prophet was no sacred figure like the priest. Prophets are profane—*pro fanum*, outside (*pro*) the temple (*fanum*)—not protected by privilege or law and subject to abuse and ridicule. They are in an invidious position, caught in a dilemma. Prophets do not draw attention to themselves, lest self-interest or self-delusion block the disclosure of God's righteousness, yet God's word must find a voice in every tongue, tribe, and nation, because God's Spirit is faithful, and God will not be without witnesses. So prophets speak up, act decisively, and pay dearly. So who will speak now, with courageous humility and inspired boldness? The question before us (If not now, when?) implies others that are uncomfortably pertinent: If not here, where? If not me, who? They all sound a note of urgency.

But prophets in the making tend to resent and resist initially. Recall Jeremiah's anguish:

> O LORD, you have enticed me,
> and I was enticed;
> you have overpowered me,
> and you have prevailed.
> I have become a laughingstock all day long;
> everyone mocks me. . . .
> For the word of the LORD has become for me
> a reproach and derision all day long.
> If I say, "I will not mention [God],
> or speak any more in his name,"
> then within me there is something like a burning fire
> shut up in my bones;
> I am weary with holding it in;
> and I cannot. . . .
> All my close friends
> are watching for me to stumble. (Jer 20:7-10).

That should shatter any ideas about how competent Jeremiah was. Yet his experience is a warning to all who aspire to genuine discipleship. Just as Jesus said he did not come to do his own will but the will of his *Abba*, so with us; otherwise we are walking by sight and not by faith. The same Spirit who sent Jesus sends us, through baptism and confirmation, so if we are to face the urgent challenge to prophetic action, we must begin by discerning the Holy Spirit. Historically, the church encounters serious trouble when propelled by hard reason rather than by imagination, or by pragmatism rather than by faith.

The voice of authentic prophecy is the Holy Spirit. If we take seriously Jesus' final discourse in John's gospel, and his words that when the time comes, "it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13:11), we must believe that the prophets spoken of in the Creed and eucharistic prayer are not just a litany of the dead but include living women and men, some of whom we should know. Yet—shockingly—the institution continues figuratively to kill them (Bourgeois, Callahan, Day, Dupuis, Gebara, Haight, Johnson, and the list goes on). This is both a warning and a challenge to us as we attempt to deny our false self, take up the cross, and follow Jesus daily.

Scholars who encourage "reading against the grain" of the biblical text say the history of Christianity can be read as the *defeats* of the Holy Spirit. The Advocate and Comforter did *not* inspire Triumphalism or Imperialism or underwrite the Roman Empire or its trappings; the Spirit did *not* endorse coercion, fear, or anathema (a curse or execration), or canonize pomp or patriarchy. These are clear evidence of institutional *resistance* to the Spirit, whose charism includes understanding, counsel, mildness, and charity and who strives to renew all humanity and creation. The challenge for us is to remain faithful by discerning and responding courageously and creatively to the Spirit, like a bishop at the 1998 Asian Synod. Addressing his peers, he asked: "Did you ever stop to think that distrust of the laity might also be distrust of the Holy Spirit?"[2]

[2] *The Tablet* (May 2, 1998): 565.

Some people would love to be caressed by the Consoler, while the less passive, once their initial resistance yields, strive to be seized by the Spirit's creativity. Such seekers are then led and inspired by a Spirit that disturbs and displaces, shakes and shifts, ruffles and rocks all perceptions, certainties, and procedures. Hence prophets evoke resistance from those who stubbornly uphold tradition and the *status quo* and rarely die quietly in their beds.

We also claim to believe that the Spirit who speaks through prophets is "Giver of Life." How are today's prophetic voices life-giving for actual people—people near despair, in penitentiaries, stigmatized as enemy, or ostracized from the Christian community? Who is the Spirit's voice today? Who are the Advocates, Comforters, Life-givers? José Comblin said in 2000, "My hope is in the Holy Spirit; the third millennium will be the era of the Spirit who is very active now." His was a Godly, prophetic voice. Pope Francis is another. We must listen to the Spirit speaking through people of hope and action. And we are called to be among them.

Spirit-Led

Certain words have become shibboleths—in-house jargon—among some groups of people who talk easily of being prophetic, *liminal*, and *communitas*-oriented (people of high-energy, generosity, selflessness, and purposefulness). This can smack of hubris, quite out of touch with reality. But, rather than jettison this language, we should try to rehabilitate it by exploring its deeper implications. First, we might discover experientially whether our poor sisters and brothers, in the church or not, see in us the virtues we may imagine we embody. A great test of our integrity was proposed by the late Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw, Michigan. Facing frequent and stultifying meetings, he once exclaimed, "What does all this have to do with the poor?" To the ingenuous answer, "Nothing, really," he immediately responded that therefore, and in the future, every diocesan agenda would be headed by the question: "What does this have to do with the poor?"

It created a sea change in the diocese and in people's attitudes. Jesus' deep question to Bartimeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" exposes a similar concern for generous risk-taking and trust, alien to those who prefer control. They give, they instruct, but they expect others to be grateful. But the approach of Jesus is different: he puts the "mini" in *ministerium*. This is real ministry. Dispensers of goods who are more familiar with important things remain in control; they put the "maxi/magi" in *magisterium*.

Truly *liminal* people (betwixt and between, status-less, marginal) find it difficult to recognize many of us as Christians, and we are deluded if we think otherwise. We are neither trapped by degradation, deprivation, or isolation nor do we seem to be striving toward transformation while believing we can change the world. That is *liminality*: vulnerability, lacking social privilege, in indefinite transition, but consciously helping to create something new and life-giving for the benefit of the wider group. Yet *liminality* is not social isolation; its purpose and outcome is true integration, not just self-actualization. Incompatible with the cult of individualism, it requires subordinating personal ambition to community needs. It may feed self-interest, but in a socio-centric context; it has neither place nor purpose in an egocentric world. Unless we choose a degree of *liminality*—Pope Francis' ministry of encounter and having "the smell of the sheep"—we are morally bankrupt and incapable of meeting people's deepest needs.

We like to think we are good people, but perhaps we are too individualistic and insufficiently anti-structure or *communitas*-focused, essential corollaries of liminality. *Communitas* is the inspiration or dynamic that drives a community—as flame is to coal, wind to sails, or fuel to a great engine. Or perhaps it is like wine, but as wine needs a decanter or fine crystal, so a powerful engine without fuel will lie silent, coals without a fire are cold and dead, and windless sails fall limply on the mast. *Communitas* is the energy created by a *liminal* group living God's dream. But like nuclear fuel, its energy is volatile and rare, difficult to handle and dangerously powerful. It is the creative energy of the Holy Spirit channeled through dedicated and zealous human instruments, giving a people direction and purpose. It sustains

faith-filled risk-takers in the face of conservative or reactionary forces that may resist and destroy prophets.

Without *communitas*-energy every community slowly dies, yet without a supportive, sustaining, committed community, every *communitas*-group will burn up or burn out. *Communitas* generates great commitment, imagination, and energy, but not by numbers or power. Its constituents are vulnerable people with minimal resources or endorsements but great faith and commitment. They are not self-important and face a daunting task.[3] But where there are such tasks, such people are needed, and the need today is urgent. Comes the hour then, comes the risk-taker?

People do not need more words or images, rhetorical, written, or visual; we are bombarded by noise, swamped with verbiage, overwhelmed by information. But when the words fall silent and the images fade, the voices of the poor can become more audible as their cries for justice seem louder. Because the Suffering Servant of Isaiah "did not raise his voice or make it heard in the street," he was able to hear the cries. As a result, he "will bring forth justice to the nations. . . . He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth" (Isa 42:2, 4). This is the prophetic task: radical (from the roots) dedication to God's justice. Actions speak more persuasively than words; people crave example more than theory, so unless we are embodying a Jesus response and not just telling people what to do, we are devoid of life. Disciples, by vocation, are needed at the margins to encounter the people who struggle to subsist there. But we are friends of God and prophets only if we have a wrenching hunger and deep thirst for God's justice and for putting our lives on the line as Jesus did. We may not change the world dramatically but we can help mend it, one day and one action at a time. This is *tikkun olam* in Hebrew,[4] something we all do differently but each of us must urgently undertake.

[3] For more on *communitas*, see Anthony J. Gittins, *A Presence That Disturbs* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 2002), 69–90.

[4] Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005) contains a profound reflection on this topic; see pp. 72–82, 220–21). Pope John

Once we put our hand to the plow, we must not look back (Luke 9:62). Prophets are God's instruments and God's choice: not insignificant but certainly not God. It is God, not the prophet, who controls the outcome. Nobody was less likely than Abraham and Sarah, as good as dead, both of them, to produce nations. The idea was preposterous, their reaction predictable, and their fertility only in their dreams. But God's promises were sure then. What about today? God will neither abandon this people nor simply fit in with our plans, but God does call and send disciples from age to age. The question, then, is not difficult, though the answer might be: will we, each of us, stand up and be sent? Or does the very idea seem—as it did to Sarah—rather laughable?

"Consecrated Soup"

One of J. D. Salinger's characters makes this critically insightful statement:

> If it's the religious life you want, you ought to know right now you're missing out on every single religious action that's going on around [here]. You don't even have sense enough to drink when somebody brings you a cup of consecrated chicken soup—which is the only kind Bessie ever brings to anybody around this madhouse. Even if you went out and searched the whole world for a master—some guru, some holy person—to tell you how to say your Jesus Prayer properly, what good would it do you? How in hell are you going to recognize a legitimate holy one if you don't even know a cup of consecrated chicken soup in front of your nose? Can you tell me that?[5]

How will *we* recognize the prophets, or do they have to be dead first, like Dorothy Day or Oscar Romero? How will we

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Paul II was described as "the Tikkun Olam pope" by Edward Kessler, *The Tablet* (April 30, 2011): 8, for his work in Catholic-Jewish relations.

[5] J. D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1961).

hear the call if we don't listen carefully? Salinger was right: if we can't recognize consecrated chicken soup or someone's passion for God's justice or their advocacy for God's marginalized and muted people, how on God's earth will we recognize Jesus in faces we see every day? Dorothy was right too: "We only love God as much as we love the person we love the least." While shunning self-importance we must surely look out for the prophets and seek our own conversion.

Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah knew exile, loss, and confusion, as many do today. Prophets, says Walter Brueggemann, tried "to help people enter into exile, to be in exile, and to depart out of it,"[6] and they are urgently needed in our time. They sense that precisely through such exile God is doing something new: discontinuity and dismantling are in the air, old answers no longer help, and creative imagination and action are required. Jeremiah risked his life by claiming that God's will is profoundly at odds with the dominant cultural values: politics, priesthood, and power combined in a lethal mix. And prophets—then and now—call dispirited, weary, perhaps disillusioned people to stand fast and remain faithful and ready for action, and they courageously commit themselves to that goal, undeterred by the cost. Those who hold tightly to what they have always done will become white-knuckled and tight-fisted, but it is impossible to embrace with a fist. Until clenched fists become open hands, we remain hostile and unable to receive, much less to give anything worthwhile.

Jeremiah's world is not so far from our own: in his day too, liberation movements thrived, creating massive social upheaval; moral authority was compromised; cherished institutions were tarnished; and trusted people were exposed as hypocrites. We are only too familiar with this broken world. Today the dispossessed still struggle for justice and refuse to be silenced, and if we cannot see God's finger pointing to myriad opportunities for our collaboration and generous service, we must be willfully blind.

[6] Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986), 1.

So who among us are the advocates, comforters, people imbued with the Spirit of God?

Jeremiah addressed a people whose stable world had gone forever. In exile and unable to face reality, they engaged in denial, self-deception, and wishful thinking[7]—like many today. The false prophet Hananiah promised a return to past glories where God would meet people's expectations—a Prosperity Gospel *avant la lettre*—but instead Jeremiah called them to accountability, conversion, and commitment to creating a new future that most of them simply found too demanding and impossible to visualize. Instead of certainty, he called for hope, but lacking certainty they could only imagine despair. Not only did they resist God who was dismantling the old world, but they vented their frustration and fear on anyone who spoke God's truth. All this is familiar today. False prophets betray themselves by uncritically supporting establishment and *status quo*; true prophets are always an embarrassment, especially to the power holders.[8] Jeremiah's bold language frightened some, but his passionate pastoral care energized him and offered comfort to people of faith.

Restoration or Renewal?

Today part of a great edifice that overreached itself is imploding; the patriarchal, gerontocratic institutional church is deeply flawed yet remained largely impervious and unrepentant until Pope Francis began a new reformation that, like those before, meets resistance and vilification from restorationists. But the church has suffered a massive loss of trust by failing to model the radical inclusion and compassion of Jesus. Disavowing transparency or accountability, it tried unsuccessfully to hide behind secrecy, exemptions, and double standards. Built on Constantinian privilege, massively buttressed since Trent, briefly renovated by Vatican II, it was subsequently riddled with scandal, an autocratic style, and a Curia that

[7] Ibid., 12.
[8] Ibid., 21.

forgot the meaning of due process or *diakonia*—willing service of the community. The church today stands astride a dangerously widening fault line. Unless pastoral ministry is revitalized by our recommitment to the example of Jesus through direct encounter, inclusive table-fellowship, reconciling foot-washing, and bold outreach beyond our comfort zone, our witness—far from being prophetic—will be only pathetic posturing and pretense.

Historically the church has struggled to find a single, authentic face, offering now the stern face of power and then the gentle face of piety. The church of power is a top-down operation that tries to control both people and theology, while the church of piety[9] flourishes at the bottom and the edges, generating holiness and a practical theology, and attracting a small but rich harvest of disciples. This is also the church of prophecy, radical discipleship, and mission, and it will always live in tension with the forces of secularism, ambition, and hegemonic power. The early, Spirit-led church of the fragile, faithful few gradually developed another, less charismatic personality as it evolved into a powerful, patriarchal institution in grave danger of forgetting its accountability and moral responsibility. As Christendom drove ahead, it inundated Europe like a tsunami with the waters of baptism, growing in influence by fair means and foul. The distinction between church and world might have been obliterated without reform movements to keep Jesus' vision alive.

But there remains a serious danger that the church of piety or prayer will withdraw, turn inward, and lose its centrifugal missional momentum, whether due to intimidation by the church of power, internal corruption and cover-up, or loss of confidence in times of decline: all these scenarios are historically attested. This would be a fundamental betrayal of the prophetic call or vocation, which is to offer—from a marginal and relatively powerless position—a moral alternative both to the secular world and the church of pomp. Disciples should constitute a "high-intensity

[9] Including the monk-popes of the eleventh-century Gregorian Reform and other significant figures and marginalized women.

movement" and a "contrast society";[10] we must not lose confidence in God's abiding faithfulness. We must keep faith.

"What would happen to ministry if in the church there were talk of the newness of God in the midst of a shambles of a failed [institution], diseased society, and troubled faith? What if mutual support replaced suspicion? Are we really a resurrection people? Resurrection faith is not only for funerals or for Easter";[11] it is for Ordinary Time and lasts until the *Parousia*.

Imaginative Hope: A Scarce Ecclesial Resource

Prophets are "inspired": the Holy Spirit (God's active imagination perhaps) animates them and expands their own imagination, the ability to recombine past experience and deep reflection, to create new images and strategies to face novel and unusual crises. Imagination is underdeveloped in cautious, pragmatic people but flourishes among those who ask new questions, make new demands of themselves, and remain persistent. Prophets seem to channel God's imagination and speak of what still might be. They neither foresee nor foretell the future, but they do "offer the present as a shockingly open and ambiguous matter, out of which various futures may yet emerge."[12] They call God's dispirited, exhausted ones to open tight fists and soften hard hearts so as to relinquish and receive, yet always respectful of the authentic tradition.[13] Urgently needed now, this resource must be something we pray for: "See, now is the acceptable time: see, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2).

Fiscal reality and lack of personnel too often dictate pastoral planning and action, but they must never compromise prophetic witness. Imaginative people ask of each other: Why not? and

[10] T. J. Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity: A Theology of Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 145.

[11] Brueggemann, *Hopeful*, 30.

[12] Ibid., 24.

[13] Ibid., 2–3.

What if? What if we study how our daily life actually impacts God's poor and promotes God's justice? Why don't I think and act differently by simply asking people how I might help? What if I were to change a single component of my schedule? Why do I not take a calculated risk for the sake of God's mission? Unless a theology of detachment from things is also a theology of attachment to people, it is barren and a betrayal of the embodied, physical, earthy ministry of the Jesus we follow. Our own narrow and biased understanding constrains and imprisons us.

Without constantly pushing beyond what is toward what might still be, our fidelity will be only to our current insights, and that is a kind of idolatry: worshiping our own ideas or images of God (or justice or virtue) rather than God alone. Prophets called people away from such idolatry, to witness to the One, True God. Perhaps we still do not understand or believe that God has actually chosen us to do something before we die. There is still time, but the clock is ticking.

Why are we so reluctant to take the prophetic leap, to risk all for God's vision? Is it because we do not see the opportunities within the problems we do see or because "authority" does not support us? Or because we have lost our nerve, are past it, or just want a quiet life? "A life of equilibrium is out of touch with reality,"[14] says Brueggemann. To be alive is to be in tension. Theologian Alexander Schmemann identifies one reason for our prophetic failures with a very uncomfortable word. "The basic disease is sloth. It is that strange laziness and passivity of our entire being which pushes us 'down' rather than 'up'—which constantly convinces us that no change is possible and therefore desirable. It is a deeply rooted cynicism which, to every spiritual challenge, responds 'what for?' [not 'what if?'] and makes our life one tremendous spiritual waste. It is the root of all sin because it poisons the spiritual energy at its very source."[15]

[14] Ibid., 23.

[15] Alexander Schmemann, *Great Lent* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1969); italics added.

The antidote to sloth, and the spur to imagination, is authentic hope. Says Jonathan Sacks, "It takes no courage to be an optimist, but it takes a great deal of courage to hope. Those who hope survive; those who are disillusioned accept."[16] Far from a breezy disposition, hope is a gift of God, a theological virtue; whoever bears that mark of prophetic witness (*martyria*) can change the world. Jeremiah, prophet of hope, articulates passionate hope.[17] Without hope our vitality withers. With Jeremiah we can believe there is more and better to come (Jer 29:5-9).

Living God's Dream

"Hope is the dream of the waker."[18] Not a daydream, it is the capacity to imagine God's idea of justice and remain faithful to a faithful God. Hope requires discernment and commitment. But torpor, depression, and fear can kill it. When people can think of nothing to do, they do nothing or wait for orders or certainty. But those who walk by faith cannot expect certainty: the challenge is to live amid ambiguity with possibilities. We cannot be shielded from risk or given complete clarity; vulnerability and risk-taking accompany hope.

Here are some suggestions. First, from the story of the noble and stately bamboo: cut down, stripped bare, and split in two, it became a channel of water into parched fields. Not what the bamboo expected, but certainly what the rice fields needed. In its dying, bamboo gave life to the community. Today many lives depend on others' selfless assistance. Who are the dedicated disciples—like the bamboo—willing to be stripped and cut for the sake of a new harvest?

Next, there is an urgent need for us to break new ground and actively seek a degree of liminality by directly encountering God's poor and marginalized people. The margin, we noted, is always

[16] Sacks, *To Heal*, 165.

[17] Brueggemann, *Hopeful*, 10, 29.

[18] Cameroonian theologian Eboussi Boulaga, perhaps borrowed from Socrates.

the center of mission, and all able-bodied disciples need to truly know God's poor. Unless we are walking with the poor, we will (at best) walk by them, and (at worst) walk on them. Jesus did not just tell others what to do: he did it. So must we, urgently, intentionally, compassionately.

James Dunn[19] said bluntly: "There is a disturbing quality about the urgency of Jesus' call—a shaking of the foundations—that those who want a quiet life are bound to resent and resist." And Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of people can change the world: it's all that ever has." But Jesus said it first.

Another suggestion (an imperative or prayer) is simply that we ask for the grace of perseverance. Before inventing the light-bulb Thomas Edison did eighteen thousand experiments: one a day for almost fifty years! It's not too late to repent, but this is surely no time to feel bad. The challenge is to think and act with imaginative courage and prudent risk-taking, together, and now. What do we have to lose? What do others have to gain? What if we went a little closer to the edge? Or, to change the metaphor, it we launched into the deep?

Finally, to return almost to the beginning: we can make the decision to go, seek, find, and encounter marginalized and muted people on the fringes of our neighborhoods. This would not be to offer the help we imagine they need, but precisely to ask *them* what they need, what they seek, what gives them hope and brings them close to despair, and how we might help. But we would need to listen carefully to them, repent, and think and act differently; we would need to learn to recognize consecrated chicken soup when we see it. That could change our life and save theirs. It's prophetic, authentic religious living. It's the Way of Jesus and the Way of the Cross. Above all, it's the Way to Life.

[19] James D. G. Dunn is professor of New Testament at Durham, England.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"BE CAREFUL HOW YOU LIVE"

(Eph 5:15)

GOSSIP, GOSPEL, AND GOD'S OPEN SECRET

Where Shall We Find Hope?

Some people ask if there is any hope or where they can look for signs of it in today's world. But this is really the wrong question because Christians should not so much go looking for hope (as if it were something outside us or beyond our grasp); Christians are called, by definition, to become people of hope and bearers of hope. Wherever there is a Christian, there should be hope. If we are people of hope, then there is hope in the world. If we give up hope, there is only despair. There is no such thing as hope in the abstract: all virtues—and vices—are embodied. If someone loves, love is in the world; when someone hates, hatred is born. A critically important characteristic of an authentic Christian, then, is that we are, and are seen to be, people of hope in a world that is not sure whether there is any good reason to hope. If you believe, hope, and love or if you know someone who does, then these virtues exist. But if you are, or know someone who is, cynical, hate-filled, or despairing, then these vices also exist: and one or another will prevail.

Running on Empty or Filled with Hope?

Here's an image from *Alice in Wonderland*: "Perplexed, the Queen [of Hearts] declared: '*You* must come from a slow sort of country!' She explained to Alice: '*Here*, you see, it takes all the running you can do, just to keep in the same place; if you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast!' "[1]

Some of us, though, are on the edge of exhaustion and simply *can't* run any faster. But this is the mad Queen, who boasted that *she* did "six impossible things before breakfast." Still, we can sympathize with her, because there's more of a touch of madness in some feverish, rushing, running religious people today. But three things we know to be true: running (with or without scissors) is not always seemly, too much speed can cause terrible accidents and dreadful harm to innocent people, and the impossible is not always desirable anyway. Which prompts a question: *how* exactly should honest Christians face tomorrow?

Before we leap we must look. Before we jump into the how of our lives, we must clarify the why. *Why* are we committed to Christian living? It is not because we took the initiative but because we are called *by our name* and because, in responding, we are sent, *in God's name*. *How* do we live fully, appropriately, and with interior peace? Through faithfulness to God: through the radical, rooted discipleship of following Jesus, and in the particular contexts that shape our lives. *Who* is at the center of my Christian life? Jesus (and his abiding Spirit) is, or should be, the center and the source. And *what* exactly is Christian living? It is the directing of ordinary lives to others, especially God's needy, and willingness to look directly into the eyes of Christ's poor and try to see through their heavy disguises. Christians are not called to live entirely conventional, controlled lives but to make some countercultural choices inspired by their commitment to the example of Jesus. Such lives are predictably unpredictable and yet progressively transformed by grace. That's the "open secret"

[1] Lewis Carroll (1832-1898), *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.*

of Christian discipleship: meaningful lives, not inverted but everted—turned inside-out to encounter God's needy people—and growing in wisdom and grace. Each of us has a serious responsibility to share that not-so-secret secret with people who search in vain for meaning and peace.

These are critical times and there is urgency in the air; but sloth is as much a vice as hyperactivity. Our response must be neither to do nothing nor to break into a mad run. Where populism or public opinion rules, we should be unafraid to take the opposite direction; that's the Christian calling. But we follow Jesus, who has shown us the Way, and the Spirit, who keeps us faithfully on track.

No one can presume to visualize the tomorrow of Christianity, but we can perhaps articulate some preconditions on which its future must rest and identify some critical imperatives that must be attended to if it is to retain its integrity and not be seduced by self-serving busyness, drift into genteel retirement, or gradually fade away in terminal irrelevance.

Hope is today's faith (lived by real persons) carried with conviction into tomorrow, but not waiting until tomorrow before committing itself. Hope is *today's* firm commitment to the future and to God's enduring faithfulness. But the future is not just time rolled forward like an infinitely extended rug patterned with identical days; time is always defined by space or location, and the future only exists *somewhere*, in a particular, concrete, context. In grammar, the word "tense" (past, present, or future) suggests tension, necessary, inevitable between what is now and what was or will be. To be human is to exist, not in stasis or equilibrium: only fossils do that. It is to live *in tension*, constantly exercising (flexing and releasing) our spiritual and pastoral muscles. Tension is good and Godly, vital and virtuous, unless it becomes fearful and crippling. Good tension is a response to divine disturbance and leads to deeper commitment to God's mission. So we might ask: Does Christianity *have* a "future tense"? Will we be able to *live* (not just survive) with the tension? Is discipleship even worth saving?

"A Sure and Steadfast Anchor" (Heb 6:19)

At the first sign of a winter blizzard, farmers on the Great Plains would stretch a rope between the back door and the barn;[2] they knew people who had lost sight of the farm in a whiteout and froze to death while still in their own backyards. This is shocking yet entirely imaginable. Today, other blizzards rage: blizzards of ecological ruin, economic injustice, virulent hatred, and bitter vindictiveness; of fears, frenzy, and meaninglessness; of self-indulgence and callous indifference to others: of wars and killings. Yesterday they raged in Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, and Congo, and they whip up in a dozen places overnight, while the prospects for tomorrow are as depressing as the blizzards.

We must tie a rope to our true foundations, because we must venture out and into the blizzard: we cannot hunker down and wait for it to pass, and we dare not say we never knew. Like the farmers familiar with people lost and frozen in a snowstorm, we too know people who have lost their moral compass and have fallen to destruction. Disconnected from their souls, they die slowly of exposure, alone and confused. Among them are celebrities and politicians certainly, but some religious leaders too, and some live in our own communities. So what do we care? And how does such dystopia affect our own Christian living?

Leonard Cohen wrote that "the blizzard of the world . . . has overturned the order of the soul." It's tempting to believe it: what has happened to the soul, of nation or even church? The soul is the very essence of the human person, hungry for truth and justice, thirsty for love and healing. Yet despite indications that the order of the soul has been severely shaken, we must disagree with Leonard Cohen, because we believe that the soul's order can never be destroyed. The blizzard may rage, but we have a strong cable—"a sure and steadfast anchor" (Heb 6:19)—connecting our

[2] See Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 1-2.

lives to the barn that holds all we need for the winter and for the spring that must follow.

But still, the metaphor stumbles: our lives are not just tethered securely between two fixed points. We have to untie one end or the other, so as to go beyond and return: looking for others caught in the storm, yet able to find our way back home, where our heart is. That's part of the secret! That's God's mission and our own. The rope is the Ariadne's Thread that will bring us back home, but we must follow it—away from the secured and tethered end, until we reach those in need. But "fear not; I am with you; I am sending you out," says Jesus. This is the measure of our lives as disciples. But when the *History of the World* is written, will "Disciples, Christian" get a mention? Will it rate a page, a paragraph, a footnote? Or will it simply not appear, even in the index, because "Disciples, Christian" was judged insignificant as a topic? Will the secret die with us, because we failed to understand it or simply failed to share it?

Three Propositions

First, the Holy Spirit is, and must always be, the inspiration for Christian living and the call to mission; second, each one of us must be a transformer of contemporary Christian discipleship; and third, cost-effective Christianity must raise rather than lower the bar for discipleship, providing examples of a more joy-filled and generous way of living.

1. The Holy Spirit Is Advocate and Inspiration for Mission

José Comblin said that if this is not the century of the Spirit, we will enter a new Dark Age; Karl Rahner said that unless Christians become mystics they will cease to be Christian; and ordained theologian Inagrace Dietterich sees true Christian spirituality as a life "shaped by the Holy Spirit," whose purpose is "empowerment for mission." Such spirituality "incorporates believers into *God's cosmic mission*, the reconciliation of humanity and healing of creation."

Mission "is not a church program or task the Spirit helps us to fulfill: the Spirit is the active missionary."[3] We *must* learn to discern and, above all, become caught by the Spirit, for every initiative comes primarily from God's Spirit and not from ourselves. Whoever wishes to be caught by the Spirit—"inspired"—must become vulnerable and trusting. We cannot be passive, since faith is interactive, relational. If we claim to be people of faith, we must build relationships: with God and through God's people. The astounding mystery of Christianity is our call to a developing relationship with God! The sad irony is that so many Christians seem to have no such intimate relationship or even awareness of its possibility.

The Spirit, imagined by many Christians as shadowy, peripheral, or unknowable, is Jesus' last great gift to his followers. We say, or write, "I give you/send you my love," or "With all my love." And Jesus gives/sends his Spirit (John 14:16-17), as real as love, to clarify everything *and* to remind them of what he told them (14:26). We in turn need to be much more familiar with this Spirit, the intimate ally and inspiration of Jesus, not just for our own comfort, but because the Spirit can accomplish more than we can possibly imagine. God knows we need that today.

The Paraclete-Advocate job description is effectively the same as our defense counsel or attorney who speaks for the accused, especially those with few resources. This Holy Spirit–Advocate is specifically for the poor, needy, and undefended. This Advocate is a public defender, not the high-profile celebrity defenders we know. This defense attorney is trying to convince a rich and selfish world it is *wrong* about the poor and has a moral duty to come to their aid. Anybody at all should be able to turn to the Spirit when in need.

Plato saw whoever took pity on poor people as morally weak and wanted to drive them out of the Republic. Nietzsche and others since have likewise accused Christians of taking pity on the

[3] Authentic Christian spirituality is "participation in the new life brought about by Christ's cross and resurrection," and "always a quest for God through an experience of faith." From *The Center Letter, 8/3,* 1996: 1-8. Center for Parish Development, Chicago, IL.

poor and have despised them for it.[4] But how often these days are Christians actually *accused* of solidarity with the poor or taken to task for our open-handed compassion? Are we even that visible, or do we hide behind our busyness? Do we, like the early Christians, call on the Holy Spirit to stand with us and give us words when we are accused of advocacy or solidarity (Mark 13:11)? Or are we virtually invisible and silent? As the question was posed years ago: if we were arrested on charges of being Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict us? We are called by baptism to be advocates, publicly committed to those in need. So, when others say, "Why bother with losers, "the homeless," or "the poor?" we must stand fast and say, "Because they are our sisters and brothers." If people say it's their own fault and they are not worth it, we will say that we are called to love others as ourselves because we are their keepers. But to do this, we need to be inspired and energized and have our imaginations take wing. The Spirit is precisely the "inspirer" and "in-Spiriter": God's imagination on the wing, God's energy in the world. But some of us, like the dispirited disciples *en route* to Emmaus, are quite uninspired and unimaginative. Our safe, rational lives need to be disturbed and fired by a new burst of the creative, risk-taking impulse of the Spirit, or there will be no transformation and no new Easter.

A dangerous assumption would be to imagine that we *are* already people of the Spirit. But so much of our thinking begins with ourselves rather than with the Spirit. A recurring question in the Acts of the Apostles is, "What does *the Spirit* want?" We often ask, "What do *we* want or need?" or "What can *we* afford?" Then we justify rational responses on pragmatic grounds. This is disingenuous. "You are forever opposing the Holy Spirit," said Stephen as the crowd stoned him (Acts 7:51). If we are to be Spirit-

[4] Friedrich Nietzsche was also incensed by Christian mercy and compassion. Like Plato, he felt the poor and weak should be banished, forgotten. Christianity stands fast on the principle of love of the poor, the outcast, the beggar at the gate, the "other" as Christ in disguise.

led we must be much more intentional, actively discerning the Spirit in our individual and corporate lives. We must be willing to follow rather than try to lead the Spirit of God. We must not be obsessed with the Holy Grail of rational, practical solutions.

In order to be people of God's Spirit, we must seek and encounter the Spirit who sent Jesus to bring God's eternal mission down to earth (Luke 4:16) but first drove him into the fire of the desert (see chap. 5) to temper the steel of his dedication. He is our example, and his Spirit is our guide, so *our* lives might also seek to do holy things, to *be* sacrifice in this sense. This is the core of discipleship: denying the false self, taking up the cross, and following the example of Jesus, not by drawing attention to ourselves, but by pointing to him, as John the Baptist did. If we truly believed that Jesus left us *the very Spirit of God* as our advocate, our lives would be different and we would willingly make changes, beyond the pragmatic and the reasonable: we would build the City of God, but on *God's* plan, which our eyes have only seen darkly, through the protective glass behind which we live. The Spirit wants to blow through our lives like a driving wind, to make all things new, to inspire us to new boldness, but we practice false prudence and fearful caution and so often smother the spirit of audacious, faith-filled risk.

Our security (relative perhaps, but so stoutly defended) can be a countersign to the faith we profess. Joan Chittister says: "In every major religion, heaven is, ultimately, immersion in the fullness of Being."[5] Only there is our security: we have no abiding city on earth. We can never understand the immensity, the mystery that is God, but we can throw ourselves into God's embrace. Like excited children jumping into a huge lake, we can become immersed yet held up by the buoyancy of its waters. So too, we become united with God, but not by thinking hard and trying in vain to solve the mystery. Joan Chittister again: "God is the Mystery nobody wants. What people covet in God is not

[5] Joan Chittister, *In Search of Belief* (MO: Liguori Press, 1999), 48.

mystery but certainty."[6] But the Spirit is our sure guide. Until we are people of the Spirit, we are not yet people of God, only pretenders. Until we are immersed in the mystery, we are not yet people of faith, only, perhaps, people of enthusiasm-dulling, life-sapping institutional religion.

2. We Must Model Tomorrow's Christian Living

In confirmation we accept a dual responsibility: to promote a real sense of mission and to break through any boundaries that keep us too safe and secure. Boundaries fall when we encounter the *anawim*—the poor and needy on our street corners or just across the way. Discipleship, a lifelong apprenticeship to Jesus, demands continuous conversion. Jesus is quite clear: we are all accountable to "the least," the poor (Matt 25:25-35).[7] Some of us never became adult Christians but continued to think and react like children. But some of us gave up on our faith when we realized we had not been equipped to live it as responsible adults, because many rules of the morning did not apply to the afternoon or evening of our lives.

So what shape will our witness take tomorrow, and the next day? How will we live our adult faith responsibly next week? We must *encounter* and *know* the poor, just as Jesus did. We must live the faith by becoming faith-filled, filled with faith, hope, and love. This is what the first Christians understood as witness, the Greek word for which is *martur*: "martyr." Walter Hollenweger said true martyr-witnesses must "gamble with their understanding of God, the world, and others,"[8] otherwise they will never be changed, converted. Each of us is called to such witness. We gamble, not with

[6] Chittister, Ibid., 18.

[7] Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 434.

[8] Walter Hollenweger, "Evangelization in the World Today." *Concilium, 114.* (NY: Seabury, 1979), 40-41. To gamble thus, opens us to God's continuing revelation; to refuse to do so is to become idolators: worshipers of *images* (ideas, fixed belief(s) of God rather than God.

God (or the world or others), but with our limited, often childish, provisional *understanding* of God (and the world, and people).

In 1867 Matthew Arnold imagined the tide of faith receding with a "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar."[9] That sounds as if faith itself is in retreat. But God is faithful, God's Spirit has *not* receded, and God remains available to all who try to reverse the human tide. They may be ridiculed by the fugitive masses, but some, though dismissed as naïve, will be the true benefactors of the broader community. But do we still have the imagination, the nerve, and the sheer dedication to keep up this vital contribution tomorrow—and the day after?

In 2001, within a hundred days of 9/11, the depleted ranks of firefighters, paramedics, and police (who deliberately ran in the opposite direction[10] to the crowds) were totally replenished. A worthwhile life will always attract generous people. And despite Christianity appearing to be very much in decline, it will not die so long as some people understand that it is worthwhile and bear witness by their own lives, lived not simply for themselves but for the brothers and sisters they may not even know.

Christianity cannot be found in brochures or on websites and does not exist in pious dreams or wishful thinking. It cannot be conjured from the thin air of slick marketing. Every confirmed ("made firm," validated) Christian must step up and find ways to cross boundaries of exclusion, to encounter whoever is deprived of human dignity. Youthful energy is not an absolute prerequisite, but passion is. "To live until you die" is the motto of the Hospice Movement for terminally ill people. We must do even more, for our call is to live beyond death and into the resurrection.

The witness of discipleship is lifelong and takes no vacation. It does not posture or point to itself. Witness is proclamation

[9] Matthew Arnold. *Dover Beach (1867).* Relevant lines include: "The sea of faith/Was once, too, at the full/ . . . But now I only hear its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar/Retreating, to the breath/ Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear/And naked shingles of the world."

[10] See Chapter Eleven, note 2.

with one's mouth shut, manifest in concrete expressions of the new order: living justice and mercy, feeding hungry bodies, healing sick people, being compassion to social outcasts and gentiles.[11] Witness is concerned not with personal survival but with prophecy: still, prophets must never become vainglorious or self-focused. Witness is always to God's truth and great works. We give God glory by staying faithful to the God who is called the Faithful One. But "the means of the old order cannot bring about the ends of the new; anything less [than a Jesus-inspired response], is [just a] recycling of the old world."[12] We cannot simply use the old playbook.

The church always needs reform, but top-down reform alone is ultimately superficial if not immoral. True reform only comes when individuals (courageous countercultural members, forming small communities) come to see, think, and act differently, under the inspiration of God's Spirit, the Advocate. Of the first disciples, the men were often petulant, selfish, and juvenile, lacking imagination in the face of crowds of hungry and dis-spirited people. Jesus challenged them to give them something to eat (Mark 6:37). To believe, after two thousand years, that we latter-day disciples, have nothing to give—or, worse, that someone else should be doing that—would betray a dreadful lack of faith, to fail to give would be a grievous sin of omission, and to imagine that our resources belong only to ourselves would be arrogant self-delusion and rank injustice.

3. There Is No Cheap Grace, Only Cost-Effective Christianity

At the age of seventy, pioneering feminist Betty Friedan wrote *The Fountain of Age*[13] to demonstrate that life can be increasingly creative and rewarding as one ages. The Fountain of Youth

[11] Ched Myers, ibid., 436.

[12] Ched Myers, ibid., 438.

[13] *The Feminine Mystique* (London, Penguin, London [1963],1992); *The Fountain of Age* (London, UK:, Pocket Books, 1994).

remains forever mythical, but the Fountain of Age can and should be sought and experienced. In 1900, US life expectancy was about forty-six years; today it has increased by a staggering 68 percent. What possible evolutionary purpose and religious significance might this have, when the lives of literally billions of other people still remain nasty, brutish, and short? Who will benefit from this extraordinary social fact?

The longevity, well-being, and general potential of many of us have vastly increased, but our lives must be Spirit-led rather than self-focused and centered beyond rather than on ourselves. And, since faith-filled living is expressed through a missional commitment, it must have a direct effect on poor and marginalized people, at home and abroad. We live, many of us, like Dives the rich man. But Lazarus the beggar is at our gate. We are the rich surrounded by the poor, and our sin is compounded if we fail to reach them because we fail to notice them. We cannot claim ignorance. So what kind of response is appropriate for us today? Unless our increased longevity is of direct benefit to someone who is poor and deprived, we are a scandal and disgrace, undeserving of the name Christian.

At the heart of the gospel is a set of paradoxes: to gain life we must lose it; the first will be last and the last first; the master must become the servant. But there is an even starker one: many of the very people for whom Jesus came—*to save*—would nevertheless die from poverty or violence inflicted by other people. What was true then is truer now, and less acceptable. Though he called people to discipleship, he also said darkly, "You will all become deserters" (Mark.14:27). We are called not to inflict suffering, but to lay down our lives for others, not to run away, but to be steadfast and to remember that without our Lord we can do nothing. This is Christianity, pure and simple. The value of following the Way of Jesus depends on our commitment to a broken world and our enduring hope in the God of tomorrow. This is discipleship, and it costs not less than everything.

Cost-effectiveness describes a positive relationship between price and value. Some things are expensive (price) but durable

and worth paying for (value). Initially, although Christianity was very costly, people valued it highly and the faith spread exponentially: a marginal sect grew to six million people.[14] After Constantine (d. AD 337), things changed radically: Christianity was first tolerated, then endorsed, and sometimes enforced. Quality suffered, and Christianity, now cheaper and easily available, proved far less cost-effective. But there is only one authentic form of Christianity: the costly version. There is no "cheap grace,"[15] no cheap discipleship. True disciples respond publicly to the invitation to seek the treasure joyfully, and to sell everything for it, not simply for personal salvation, but to enrich many. Cost-effective Christianity is demanding, but some people are willing to pay a high price; they believe it is worth living, and even dying, for.

After the empty tomb "the disciples were haunted by the vision that had haunted [Jesus], and came to identify the vision with the living Jesus himself. Then they had to explain and above all to live the paradox of the kingdom. But the seed had been scattered":[16] they would give their lifeblood for the harvest. They understood the secret, "hidden since the foundation of the world" but now revealed: God's open secret is that *living the gospel paradox is the way to life*. It is neither cheap nor easy. But disciples, inspired by Jesus and fragments of discipleship they see in other Christians,[17] must be open-handed and risk-taking as they seek the treasure as their ancestors did.

[14] Extrapolated from Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco, CA:, HarperCollins, 1997), 5-7.

[15] This is the familiar phrase of Diettrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (NY:, Simon & Schuster/Touchstone,1995). Chapter One, "Costly Grace."

[16] Ched Myers, ibid., 447.

[17] Diettrich Bonhoeffer, writing from prison: "It all depends on whether or not the fragment of our life reveals the plan and material of the whole. There are fragments which are only good to be thrown away, and others which are important for centuries to come because their fulfillment can only be a Divine work. These are 'fragments of necessity.' If our life, however remotely, reflects such a fragment . . . we shall not have to bewail our fragmentary life, but on

"Pragmatism has killed idealism," said a political guru. His remedy is this: "Every candidate [read 'disciple'] should be able to describe four things: a noble purpose; a fight against injustice; a sense of direction; a destination. I don't believe many of us can," he concluded.[18] He may well be right, but it should not be that way.

Gossip and Gospel: Passing on the Open Secret

The words "gossip" and "gospel" have a common root: God. "Gossip" mixes "God" and "sib" (an old word for "family");[19] a "godsibb" referred to a person spiritually related to God by baptism and, by extension, to a village community. "Gospel" combines "God" and "spell" (which is about weaving words)[20] and means both God's tidings and good tidings. Originally gossip was conversation that took place (at christenings, weddings, or funerals) when the family and community gathered and news was shared; only later was its meaning twisted and perverted.[21] Gospel, of course, is God's own Word, which *should* be spell-binding and attract the world's attention. Jesus was glad the secret was

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the contrary, rejoice in it." (In *The Cost of Discipleship*: 33. From the *Memoir*, by G. Leibholz).

[18] Lord Maurice Saatchi. Quoted in *The Tablet,* 2 July, 2005:11. Another Party member added: "The Conservative Party's problem is not [a question of] getting more about the individual 'me' into its philosophy; the challenge is to explain where 'other people' fit in. It is the other people who change an individual life into a meaningful part of a family, a neighborhood or a nation" [*ibid*]. The applicability to discipleship is obvious.

[19] It is the root of "sibling" which properly refers to one's brothers and sisters.

[20] A spell is not only a mystical or magical incantation but the root of words like "spellbound": captivated by word pictures.

[21] Gossip was not only the good news, but also the bad—including what families *disapproved* of: circulating the information would shame unrepentant lawbreakers. It was Godly, not malicious social control. But since the lawbreakers were typically men and the gossipers were typically women, by the eighteenth century European (patriarchal) society caricatured it as malicious tittle-tattle, women's tales, and lies. This is a travesty.

hidden from those who thought they were wise and revealed to the "infants" (Matt 11:25). Like the beneficiaries of the secret, we must not keep it but actively share it, because it's an open secret, intended for everyone! But how will people know unless they have someone to tell them?[22] And who wants to know these days? Who wants to join us in living it out? Do people not know because we remain silent and invisible, or because it's simply not worth knowing? Do they not dare because it is so challenging or simply not care because it seems meaningless?

St. John Paul II's millennial encyclical[23] called for "a new creativity in charity." This does not mean fancy schemes or favors dispensed condescendingly: nothing is so cold and bloodless as that kind of charity. Authentic charity is acting justly by giving ourselves, solidarity with poor people, and dislocation of our comfortable, rational, organized lives. Love presupposes encounter: whoever claims to love God must encounter God through a neighbor (Matt 25:31-46). An effective way to God is by true encounters with the poor, but "the poor" and "the outcast," as such, are only categories, abstractions. We cannot love abstractions, only flesh and blood. "To love another person is to see the face of God," as *Les Misérables* reminds us.

Being Caught—Inspired—by God's Spirit

We return to the beginning, to the Spirit, Advocate, Guide, and Defender of victimized people. The Spirit breathes wisdom into those who listen carefully, so we must be attentive and re-

[22] Joan Chittister put it well: "We have to forget one kind of church and recommit ourselves to . . . the one created by the Holy Spirit. [Big institutions] are not the model . . . [but like the one] that sprang up in Jerusalem after the death of Jesus, formed by women in house assemblies, preached by laymen on street corners . . . , witnessed in the whole Christian community of Jews who saw the gifts of the Holy Spirit—prophecy and tongues, discernment of spirits and healing, service and proclamation—in one another." (*The Fire,* 171-2). So it should be with us.

[23] John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte, 50.*

sponsive. We need to craft and live out an authentic spirituality of risk to counterbalance our overcautious and sometimes false prudence and save us from chronic predictability. We don't need more fancy programs and detailed road maps but more discovery procedures and radical motivation, more dedicated prophets and reinvigorated disciples. Discovery procedures are the bold, creative steps we take in faith that help us find the way ahead as we follow the tracks of the Spirit. Dedicated prophets are not the self-proclaimed but those whose eyes and ears are fixed on and attuned to the Spirit who leads and goes before. Reinvigorated disciples are steadfastly committed to their own conversion, still hungry for God's justice, and inspired by what should and could yet be. Otherwise we are not prophets but charlatans.

We can never catch up with the Spirit who moves where he or she wills and can be quick and elusive. Yet God promises to give power to the fainthearted, and by God's grace we will remain committed to following wherever the Spirit may lead. To paraphrase Isaiah, we shall not give up; our hope may falter but will not fail because God will renew our strength. We shall run and not be weary, walk and never tire, and we will rise on eagles' wings (see Isa 40:31). Though we can never grasp, comprehend, or catch the Spirit, we can be swept up, caught, embraced by the Spirit if we live by faith. But our lived faith must be generative: giving hope and vitality to people losing hope and closer to death than life. We must try to live by faith beyond any formulation, by hope far deeper than optimism, and by love stronger than death. We must strive to live in the Spirit, as Jesus did. It's the only honest way to live, the only way that makes survival worth anything. And it is always both/and: *both* the Way of the Cross *and* the Way of Life.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"PEOPLE WERE SAYING, 'HE HAS GONE OUT OF HIS MIND' "

(Mark 3:21)

CALLED TO HOLY MADNESS

Holy Madness

The topic of holy madness has a long academic pedigree. It is the result of an "initiation crisis" that produces a shift in understanding and action (a conversion), a deep conviction, and a drive to dedicate oneself to others at significant personal cost. Inspired by the divinity and legitimized by the people, its signs can be ambiguous. The post-initiation lifestyle is palpably abnormal by conventional standards. But the integrity of the agent makes it admirable and of practical or spiritual value for many. It is not for everyone because it is radically demanding. But it is so widespread[1] that "societies which *do not* utilize these ASCs [altered states of consciousness] are historical exceptions."[2] Holy madness is often sought through initiation or a vision quest: the shaman/guru/holy one seeks, through ASCs, to reach beyond the visible and communicate with spiritual agents and even the deity, but never for personal gain. Divine madness is described

[1] Ninety percent of people in a study of five hundred communities.

[2] John Pilch, *The Cultural World of Jesus, Cycle B* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 53, quoting Erika Bourguignon.

by Plato (d. 348 BC) yet is much older. Plato distinguished two types: a disease and a divine state: "Our greatest blessings come to us by way of madness, a divine gift."[3]

Certain features of holy or divine madness are found in Christianity, but God incarnate in Jesus closed the gap between humans and the gods that shamans attempted to bridge. Yet shamanic thinking was very much alive in Jesus' day. Levitical priests offering Semitic sacrifices mediated on behalf of a powerless people. The Way of Jesus was a radical alternative: now everyone can have a personal relationship with God and priest-intermediaries are unnecessary. But because Jesus does not coerce, not everyone will follow it, though there will always be a remnant of loyal devotees, not powerful or pretentious, but simply dedicated to following him. Where others might follow the line of least resistance or feel powerless, such disciples assist others and find life-affirming alternatives to prevailing cultural fashions. They seek neither upward mobility nor renown but consciously embrace what is classically called holy madness.

Unholy Madness

Aware of our propensity for self-delusion, we should identify the bogus or counterfeit form: unholy madness. Then we can reflect on our lives as striving for holiness but also being perceived as just a little mad or crazy. Unholy madness may be involuntary-blameless or voluntary-blameworthy. Albert Nolan describes the first, terribly debilitating type, part of the worldview in Jesus' time, but we can apply it to our own.

> The body is the abode of spirit, but other spirits could also inhabit a person's body—a good spirit (the Spirit of God) or an evil, unclean spirit, a demon. This would be observable in a person's behavior. The extraordinary behavior of a prophet would be conceptualized as possession by the Spirit

[3] Quoted by June McDaniel in *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 3–6.

> of God; whereas the pathological behavior of the mentally ill would be conceptualized as possession by an evil spirit.[4]
>
> It was a dark and fearful world in which the helpless were threatened from all sides by hostile spirits. Today such people would be called oppressed, marginal. They were the overwhelming majority.[5]

Unholy madness besets not only the possessed or insane but "nobodies" in general, who constituted perhaps 98 percent of the population. They could be driven mad with fear of evil spirits or by the sanctioned injustice of scribes and tax collectors or vindictive neighbors. Jesus was immune to this epidemic but determined to change it from the inside. Choosing to become a "nobody" himself, he formed a community of "nobodies." Possessed by holy madness, he embraced those trapped in a mad world, calling people victimized by authorities to embrace his holy madness (his Holy Spirit) and live with focus and hope.

But unholy madness can also be found in the guilty and bespeaks effectively abandoning God. This is folly: trying to act like God but assuming we can thrive by our own wit and wisdom. Such people are identified shockingly in the book of Revelation. "I know all about you: how you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were one or the other, but since you are neither, I will spit you out of my mouth. You say to yourself, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and have everything I need,' not realizing that you are wretchedly and pitiably poor" (Rev 3:15-17). Such culpable, unholy madness still exists within the church. Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, who in his final interview chided the church for blaming others for increasingly empty churches and being unwilling to be converted, said: "The church is tired," and "200 years behind the times." He continued, "The church must recognize its errors and follow a radical path of change." "Our churches and religious houses are

[4] Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), 24 (slightly abridged).

[5] Ibid., 26.

big and empty, the bureaucratic apparatus of the church grows, our rites and our dress are pompous. . . . Well-being weighs on us."[6] He spoke of families broken by divorce and then ostracized, effectively driven mad by a church that discriminates and fails to support them. It is an unholy, unbalanced, mentally deranged response. Amid opposition, Pope Francis is trying Jesus' approach.

Abbot Martin Werlen from Switzerland made "a fiery appeal for church reform" in five points: the church lacks Pentecost fire; needs to learn from the Orthodox Church about compassionate inclusion of remarried divorced people; should urgently revisit the rule of clerical celibacy; must stop muzzling open discussion; and needs to call bishops to conversion.[7] His is a diagnosis of unholy, ungodly, and culpable madness, endemic within the church. But there is also madness in so-called civil society, especially in politics, banking, and a culture of violence. So how shall we identify the holy madness to which we are called when the other kind is ubiquitous?

Christian Disciples: Called to Holy Madness

Elie Wiesel recovered a very old story about a wise king whose astrologer announced that everyone who ate of the coming harvest would be driven mad. His counselor advised him to hoard food from the previous year's harvest, but the king wanted everyone to survive. The counselor warned him to be realistic: some people had to die. But the king insisted that if everyone went mad, he wanted to be with them yet somehow to be aware of his own madness as he endeavored to serve and save whoever he could. The story concludes: "And putting his arm round the shoulder of his counselor, the king continued: 'You and I shall therefore

[6] John Allen, Final Interview with Cardinal Martini, *National Catholic Reporter* (September 4, 2012); http://ncronline.org/print/blogs/ncr-today/translated-final-interview-martini.

[7] Christa Pongratz-Lippitt, "Swiss Abbot Makes Fiery Appeal for Church Reform," *National Catholic Reporter* (December 20, 2012); http://ncronline.org/print/news/global/swiss-abbott-makes-fiery-appeal-church-reform.

mark each other's forehead with the sign and seal of madness. And every time we look at each other, we shall remember, you and I, that we *are* mad.'"[8]

The story is strikingly relevant today: "We shall *choose* to enter the madness, marking each other with the seal of madness. And when we look at each other we shall remember that we *are* mad." As Christians, we are marked with the sign of baptism, confirmation, and the cross, reminding us we are not alone but a community. We have all experienced an "initiation crisis"—at the sacraments of initiation but recurring often. And we are marked with the divine seal of holy madness and must be recognizable signs for people not sure if they are going mad or being driven to unholy madness by the church, confused by the mixed signals constantly being generated in a world searching in so many contradictory ways for meaning and hope.

We are all called to holiness through a way of life some judge irrational, or worse. To live the commandments, keep promises, speak truth, strive for integrity, and embrace discipleship is to be increasingly identifiable as touched by (holy) madness. Not only is this what Jesus did, it is what we believe, in our mad world, to be an invitation we cherish. Aung San Suu Kyi observes: "If you choose to do something, it is not a sacrifice it is a choice, not a burden but a gift." So we can explore holy madness, seeing how it marks recipients as marginal people who find life and hope in their very strangeness and marginalization.

Shamans, Gurus, and Ourselves

We are far from perfect and ashamed of the many scandals in the church down through the ages. "Wounded Healers" was Henri Nouwen's phrase, but Jesus calls us to be "healed healers": "be healed" precedes "heal." This fits well with shamans and

[8] Elie Wiesel, *Souls on Fire: Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972/1993), 169ff. This is from Hasidic Master Nahman of Bratzlav.

healers from many cultures; but psychiatrist Anthony Storr offers another, biblically based image (see Dan 2:31-35).[9]

Recently I received a letter from an Anglican priest from Sri Lanka, which is predominantly a Hindu and Buddhist country. Newly graduated with a doctorate in theology, this was his first letter as a doctor, and I had been his director. He addressed me, without flattery, as "my venerable guru." I returned to Storr's book to recall the qualities being attributed to me, and noticed the subtitle: *Saints, Sinners, and Madmen*. He says, "Many gurus have been entirely unworthy of veneration: false prophets, madmen, tricksters or unscrupulous psychopaths." Not altogether encouraging, but two points were helpful: many insights gurus have follow from some mental distress or physical illness (an "initiation crisis"); and gurus possess *charisma*. But the line between sanity and madness is easily crossed, and gurus are vulnerable to being deluded and dangerous, or deeply uncertain about their own integrity and subject to crippling doubt. Even a judicious guru risks being labeled or becoming mad. And every authentic guru will challenge some constituencies, incurring criticism and perhaps retaliation. It is a delicate line to walk.

Storr says: "When one encounters someone who genuinely cares little for self but much for others, and who rates the rich and powerful below the poor and weak, the impression can be overwhelming as well as revolutionary."[10] A way to deflect challenges to oneself is to call such a person mad. This happened to Jesus and to some of his disciples in every generation.

Ignatius, de Nobili, and Jesus

Before founding the Jesuits, Ignatius (1491–1556) experienced physical illness, mental distress, and a sense of worthlessness. A cannon ball had destroyed his legs, but during his trauma-laced

[9] Anthony Storr, *Feet of Clay: Saints, Sinners, and Madmen; A Study of Gurus* (New York: Free Press 1996).

[10] Ibid., 146.

recovery he was transformed, becoming an extraordinary leader with a lifelong struggle for sanity. But he had a clear vision, total conviction, and new purpose. No longer driven by personal ambition, he sought only others' well-being.[11] But he was vilified, brought before the Inquisition, and imprisoned. His experience places him alongside many who have suffered at the hands of the very institution they are pledged to serve with integrity. The litany of canonized saints who were first persecuted and even excommunicated—from Athanasius to Joan of Arc, or Pope Martin to Mary McKillop—is a reminder: whoever tries to follow the Way of Jesus may pose a threat to an institution seeking to maintain the prevailing orthodoxy.

Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656) left Italy for India, abandoning the trappings of his own culture and becoming probably the first European to master Sanskrit. Living simply, he embraced the privations of his initiation crisis and the penitent lifestyle of a Brahmin *sanyasi* (renouncer), a word applied only to those over fifty, deeply committed to contemplation. He made the crossover into Hindu culture without losing his personal integrity, leaving a lasting legacy for Jesuits, Hindus, and Indian Christians. But he too was condemned, by a local church conference, before being vindicated by Pope Gregory XV (1623). He also became a guru: a highly respected practitioner and teacher of Christian discipleship.

The prelude to Jesus' public life was the temptation, a classic example of an ASC, precipitated by hunger, fasting, sleep-deprivation, pain, and prayer. "Jesus resembles other gurus in undergoing a period of inner conflict which is resolved by a new and special insight which he believed to come directly from his Father."[12] Then Jesus is vindicated and commissioned to begin his public life (Matt 4:11). This does not put an end to his divine or holy madness, which marks his entire life and had been intimated by Simeon. And of course Mary was not immune: St. Luke

[11] Ibid., 139.
[12] Ibid., 142–43.

says Mary's entire existence would be run through as by a sword. Like Jesus, she will be pushed to the edge of madness, driven out of her mind with worry and grief until she holds his cold corpse. Like his, hers is quintessentially holy madness: the mental anguish of the guru, the saint, the true servant of God.

Another incident is potentially so embarrassing that St. Mark might well have omitted it. Yet there is the blatant statement that "[Jesus'] relatives set out to take charge of him, convinced that he was out of his mind" (the Greek verb here means explicitly "to be deranged, mad"), while "The Scribes were saying 'Beelzebul is in him'" (Mark 3:21-22). Clearly Jesus was judged eccentric, even possessed, and a sign of contradiction, for twice the gospel tells us of God's explicit endorsement: "[This is] my beloved, in whom I am well pleased." Jesus seems almost to relish the dilemma he poses. Storr observes, "*Gurus* often seem indifferent to family ties," and "Jesus' underlying message is that everyone devoted to a whole-hearted search for God's Kingdom is essentially alone."[13] Have we sufficient focus and passion to continue to embrace a faith-based life that is unusual, abnormal, and perhaps even a little crazy, not only in the popular view, but sometimes even in our own?

Charism and Charisma: Marks of Holy Madness

The meanings of the words *charism* and *charisma* overlap, but they can also be distinguished. Both touch on holy madness. *Charism*, much the older, is a theological term, while *charisma*, like holy madness, is sociological.

A charism originates in God as a gift of the Spirit to individuals or groups. For others' benefit, it is to be given freely and is not a personal possession. It functions to build up the *ekklesia*, church, showing the in-breaking realm of God. Religious orders, founded to serve people who are poor, needy, deprived, or neglected, claim various charisms. Those who embody the charism

[13] Ibid., 144.

are identifiable as nonmainstream, different from others, and countercultural in some respect: judged at least a little out of their minds, like Jesus.

The root of charism (*charis*) means "favor" or "thanks," the verb-form produces, "I rejoice," and the motivation is love: not simply our love for God, but God's loving initiative. Unsurprisingly, there is a long history of "tension between charismatic individuals and ecclesiastical authorities,"[14] and theologian Nathan Mitchell notes that St. Paul was not immune, but also emphasizes that the whole people of God is properly charismatic and should be characterized by "an interplay of mutual ministries that complement rather than compete with one another." He continues wryly: "Historically, this Pauline perspective has not always succeeded in preventing conflict between the so-called 'hierarchy of *charisms*' and the institutional hierarchy in the Church."[15] He points to the not infrequent eruption of ecclesial movements originating not from the top or center but from the margins, "all of which asserted the role of charismatic gifts (prophecy, teaching, healing) that emerge independently [of] the church's officeholders."[16] Reforms, like those of Huss, Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, and others were condemned as heretical and their initiators martyred or excommunicated, but they served a vital purpose: to call the church to recognize, belatedly, that the Spirit is often active beyond the horizon of those holding the center ground.

Individuals touched by charismatic madness continue to challenge the institution, from Mercy Sister Theresa Kane, begging John Paul II to admit women to all ministries, to Sister Margaret McBride, excommunicated after she allowed a medical procedure that saved the life of a mother but killed her unborn child; to Bishop Morris of Toowoomba and Maryknoll priest Roy Bourgeois who simply asked for discussion. The challenge

[14] John Gillman, "Charism," in *Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Carroll Stuhlmueller (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 128.

[15] Nathan Mitchell, "Charism," in ibid., 131.

[16] Ibid.

must continue so long as people of principle and conscience try to think and act the way Jesus did. His treatment is a lesson for all, and for some an encouragement as much as a warning.

Charisma shares much of its meaning with charism but is of more recent vintage. Borrowed from a church historian[17] in the nineteenth century by sociologist Max Weber, it was defined (in sexist language) as: "A certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader."

Not all leaders have charisma, but people can recognize it. Authentic charisma is the validation given to leaders by their followers or community: without it the leader is just a voice in the wilderness. Yet there is a double and deadly danger: if a genuinely charismatic leader is thwarted or if a bogus leader is trusted.

A sincere charismatic leader may receive endorsement from serious-minded followers, until a superior authority intervenes and attempts to silence or quash such leadership, producing great danger of conflict and schism. This happened with the Society of St. Pius X, founded by archbishop Lefebvre, a highly charismatic leader, and with other groups branded as schismatic or heretical by the church. As Nathan Mitchell again observes, "Church authorities must not merely tolerate but critically encourage charisms."[18] This is a clear echo of St. Paul's admonition: "Never try to suppress the Spirit or treat the gift of prophecy with contempt" (1 Thess 5:19). As philosopher Charles Taylor puts it: "The barely audible voice of the Holy Spirit will often be heard

[17] This was Rudolph Sohm's work, *Kirchenrecht* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1982).

[18] Mitchell, "Charism," 131.

better when the loudspeakers of armed authority are silent."[19] And this seems to be happening now.

Yet even if ecclesiastical or civil society encourages charismatic individuals, tragically bad judgments may still occur. Jim Jones in Guyana or David Koresh in Texas were leaders with bogus or self-serving charisma that proved disastrous and destructive. This happened with Marcial Maciel, founder of the Legion of Christ, who duped John Paul II and created an international financial and sexual scandal, and with disgraced ex-archbishop of Boston, Cardinal Bernard Law, who brought shame on the church. Having fled America, he received a handsome pension, the sinecure of a major basilica, leadership of seven dicasteries, and authority to nominate bishops before his forced retirement in 2011.

Charismatic charlatans and deluded gurus sow deceit and reap destruction. The line between madness and sanity, integrity and egoism, conviction and posturing is sometimes very fine. In a brave and encouraging final word, Mitchell warns: "New and hitherto unknown charisms must be allowed to emerge—as they did, for instance, in the period following the Council of Trent, when new communities of men and women arose in response to new pastoral needs. Charisms must be re-valued in our day as the necessary (if not always comfortable) complement of ecclesiastical office, as an essential aspect of the Church's mission as the 'holy people of God,' called to witness to God's lavish gifts of nature and grace."[20]

Knowing how to discriminate between charism as God's gift to the church and charisma as a personal attribute remains an unresolvable problem, for charisms are expressed by individuals. This takes us back to the precipice on which we stand, the edge of holy madness: how to gauge whether or when to lead, or whom to follow, rather than to run away or remain silent? The

[19] Charles Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (Boston, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), chap. 9, "A Catholic Modernity," 172.

[20] Mitchell, "Charism," 131.

way forward is often unclear, and we walk only by the flickering light of faith and hope. But hope is a risk that must be run,[21] as a wise author averred, to his cost; his splendid book was banned. And Anaïs Nin, quoted earlier, said: "The day came when the risk to remain tight in the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom."[22] Calculated risk-taking is seen by many in today's church as madness. Yet generous souls, risking to blossom in life-giving pain rather than to endure the terminal anguish of craven survival, are critically necessary. Leadership may call for madness, but that kind of madness is badly needed today.

Stigma and Sacrifice

Sociologist Rodney Stark explains the rise of religious groups on religious or social margins and identifies the strange attraction of stigmas and sacrifices. Stigmas include "all aspects of social deviance that attach to membership of a group. By meeting these demands, members deviate from the norms of the surrounding society."[23] "Stigma prevents the group becoming a club or closed sect."[24] Maybe we need more stigma as a sign of madness to wear with pride.

Sacrifices are "investments and foregone opportunities required of those who would gain and retain membership in the group. [The two] often go hand in hand."[25] Certainly they did in the early Church. Each has, potentially, a significant value: they define or delimit a group and minimize the likelihood of free-riders or parasites. They also increase participation among

[21] Georges Bernanos (1888–1948), Catholic writer who attacked indifference. His splendid novel, *The Diary of a Country Priest*, was put on the *Index of Forbidden Books.* It intimated that priests might have doubts and temptations.

[22] Anaïs Nin (1903–1977), artist, writer, and feminist leader of the 1970s.

[23] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1996), 176.

[24] Ibid., 193.

[25] Ibid., 176.

members. When the price of membership is very high, it is also cost effective: people choose what is expensive if they believe it is worth paying for. If today's Christians are willing to pay dearly for living the gospel, it is because they believe the rewards are acceptable. Outsiders may judge this irrational and even mad; to disciples, it is precisely the nature of faith-based holy madness.

The first Christians were under no illusions: to practice their faith was extraordinary and often dangerous. They were abnormal because their lifestyle was a radical departure from pagan Roman practice. Yet Christian madness inspired self-sacrifice and peace of mind in a widening circle of people. The number of martyrs in the early centuries was only in the "hundreds rather than thousands,"[26] but their willingness to risk death (from plague or prison) did seem madness, holy or not.

Stark identifies Christian resoluteness as the product of "the collective creation of commitment," which spread by contagion and changed the world. This was no death wish or martyr complex but a conviction—not irrational but certainly at odds with cold rationality or realism and stronger than death—articulated starkly by St. Paul to the Romans. To paraphrase: "If God is for us, who is against us? God gave his Son for all of us, Jesus, who died, was raised, and is at the right hand of God. So nothing can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are being persecuted" (see Rom 8:31-35). This was neither clinical madness nor irrationality, and the charge that religion is essentially irrational has been thoroughly debunked. Properly analyzed, stigma and sacrifice represent rational if unfashionable choices.[27] Christians showed quiet but public courage, living in ways that posed a sharp contrast to the lives of most others. There have always been such people inspired by the holy madness of Jesus, just as there have always been Christians with feet of clay, unable

[26] According to W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 413.

[27] Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 166–70.

or unwilling to pay the cost. Different times and circumstances call forth different gifts and responses, from heroism to hypocrisy.

After the Church of the martyrs passed, monasticism could be born, because there will always be a need for followers of the Way to constitute new countersigns to empires and dominations. In every age Jesus calls us to question and to think differently from many other people, about virtually everything: God, providence, justice, love, and sacrifice itself. The *Letter to Diognetus* from the mid-second century, written by a passionate believer who signs himself simply as *learner*—the word for 'disciple,' expresses Christian convictions and pagan responses: "Christians are not distinguished from the rest of [people]. Yet the whole tenor of their way of living stamps it as admittedly extraordinary. Those who hate them are at a loss to explain their hatred. The world hates them because they oppose its pleasures. Christians are shut up in the world as in a prison, but it is precisely they that hold the world together. Christians, when penalized, show a daily increase in numbers on that account. They are not at liberty to desert [their post]."[28]

Such was the kind of conviction our fathers and mothers in the faith lived out and passed to succeeding generations; they were not clinically demented or insane. But Pliny the Younger (early second century), astonished by their conviction and composure, did note, with equal parts admiration and frustration, their "stubbornness and unbending obstinacy"; a little later, Galen wrote that "their contempt of death (and of its sequel) is patent to us every day."[29] This was their legacy, and now the present generation holds this treasure in our earthen vessels. What will be ours?

[28] *The Letter to Diognetus* (currently dated around AD 165), Ancient Christian Writers 6, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph Plumpe (Baltimore, MD: Newman Press, 1948), 138–40.

[29] Quoted in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 113–14. The Pliny (the Younger, ca. AD 112) quotation is from "Letter to the Emperor Trajan on Christians in Bithynia," in *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. H. Bettenson (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), 5–7. The Galen reference is in Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1984), 141.

Committed, Marked, Commissioned

We speak of committed Christians. The dictionary defines "committed" as "confined, imprisoned, officially taken into custody or placed in a mental institution or reformatory." Perhaps some of us should be; but those who cherish their faith as a vocation should be joyfully committed, not haplessly confined. It is said that our contemporary world has lost its metanarrative—an overarching story or myth giving focus and helping people remember who they are. But the Judeo-Christian metanarrative has been, for millions of people over millennia, an interpretive key, a solace, and a beacon. It must be carried forward in a world showing distinct signs of losing its bearings and sanity. We are marked with twin seals: an invisible one marks our baptismal commitment to follow the Way of Jesus; our bodies and lives constitute the other. This is the mark of the holy madness required for living that commitment faithfully until the end.

In that final interview, Cardinal Martini called the Church to conversion, "beginning with the pope and the bishops," but urgently demanded of us all. "Where is the fire?" asked Martini and Abbot Werlen. "Where are the individuals, full of generosity? Where is an archbishop Romero or the Jesuits martyrs?" Even more urgently: "Where are the heroes among us who can inspire us—with faith like the centurion, enthusiasm like John the Baptist, faithfulness like Mary Magdalene, or daring like Paul? Only those who perceive the Word in their heart can help achieve the renewal of the Church. Neither the clergy nor ecclesiastical law can substitute for this inner life of the human person."[30]

The Body of Christ is sickening from multiple debilitating infections. There are many reasons for pessimism and ample evidence to show all is not well. But we will not give up hope, that gift, that theological virtue, that indispensable part of being Christian. It is not negotiable, and the alternative is despair, which would be to lose faith in God.

[30] Allen, "Final Interview."

"With Persecutions"

The slow-to-understand disciples were "amazed" and "afraid" when Jesus promised persecutions (Mark 10:30, 32), and, not surprisingly, many people think that following this *Way* of Jesus is madness. But, as biblical theologian James Okoye says, persecution "is a pervasive feature of the entire life of Jesus in Mark. The Christian is warned to expect [it]; followers may expect to be shunned, avoided, and even expelled from the kinship community. Persecutions are essential conditions of preaching the gospel. Conversion, following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, may occasion familial or social tension,"[31] as it did with Jesus.

Survival, particularly for a male who left house or brothers or sisters (Mark 10:30), would have been impossible without another kin-based community. Jesus offered this: the so-called fictive (not fictional) kinship of adoption into God's family for all who took the risk: the madness option. Nevertheless, aware that some people can be lured by a martyr complex or even a messiah complex, Jesus was absolutely clear. Okoye again: "People under persecution may develop the 'martyr complex' or delight in images of apocalyptic vengeance on their tormentors. Mark allows neither. The community has an essential and reconciling relationship to the world. . . . Even persecution itself becomes an occasion for witness. . . . The martyr complex is debunked."[32]

This kind of witness is our own call to holy madness, made holy by the simple fact that it is totally dedicated to God and God's realm.

[31] James C. Okoye, "Reconciliation: Biblical Reflections; II. With Persecutions—Mark 10:30," *New Theology Review* 10, no. 2 (May 1997): 31–38.

[32] Ibid., 36.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU"

(John 2:5)

MARY, THE FIRST TO HEAR AND RESPOND

An Odd Way to Treat Your Mother

The gospel tells of a woman in the crowd who wanted to compliment the mother of Jesus in the most respectful way possible. She said: "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you" (Luke 11:27). To modern ears this sounds strange if not a little cringe-inducing, but Jesus' reply sounds even stranger: rather dismissive, and perhaps even disrespectful of his own mother: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it," he says. There was another occasion too when the arrival of Jesus' mother and brothers—those we would call cousins—was announced. His response is no less surprising: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he says. And looking around and embracing the whole crowd, he says, "Here are my mother and my brothers [including sisters]. Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35).

These two incidents tell us three things: first, for Jesus, discipleship is radically equal and inclusive. There is no hierarchy of power (only of service); the last can be first and the excluded can be included. Second, hearing and doing are the primary criteria

for discipleship. And third, Mary his mother, as the very first person to hear and to respond, is entirely worthy of the title—honorary perhaps, but chronologically utterly appropriate—of "first disciple."

Human Being and Being Human

The ancient Israelites were hardly the most sophisticated people in the world, and far less culturally developed than the Egyptians or the empire-building Assyrians or Babylonians. But one thing they clung to with tenacity was the instinct that a primary or fundamental characteristic of a human being was having the ability to hear and consequently to internalize, reflect, and then to act decisively. One of their working definitions of a human being was simply a person "having ears." To grasp how important this was for the Jewish people is to hold a key to understanding not only the Hebrew Bible but the life and times, and the focus of the teaching, of Jesus. The Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament), is the story of the people chosen by God and brought into a covenant with God. Yet they frequently and tragically failed to listen to God and broke the covenant, thereby signaling their failure to live up to their own dignity and potential as human beings. They were human beings but not always being human in the fullest sense.

The covenant between God and the Israelites was different from all other covenants—and there were many—between rulers, kings, or despots and the people they held in sway. Those covenants were heavily weighted to benefit the ruler. In effect, the ruler was saying to the people, "I will protect you from external enemies as long as you submit to my rule and its demands. Should you fail, by refusing to pay taxes or provide military service, I will punish and abandon you." But God's covenant with Israel was utterly different and stupendously benevolent. God was asking, almost begging, people *to hear, to listen, to internalize, and to act*, saying that even should a mother—preposterously—forget her child, God would *never* forget or abandon Israel (Isa 49:15).

God reiterates: "Listen to me, O House of Jacob, who have been borne by me from your birth. Even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save" (Isa 46:3, 4). And again: "O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me. I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me for I have redeemed you" (Isa 44:22).

Time and again God urges, "Come back to me my people," and frequently the Bible says God "repents" or "relents"—has second thoughts about punishments—in order to convince this erring people that without God they are lost. "Incline your ear, and come to me; listen so that you may have life. I will make with you an everlasting covenant" (Isa 55:3). This is unprecedented in any culture or religion.

But tragically, the story of the Jews also became a tale of broken faith, betrayal, battle, and bloodshed; deportations to Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon; loss of the original temple; occupation by Roman armies; and the collapse of national self-confidence and personal dignity. This is why Jesus needed constantly to remind the people that being human meant "having ears" and paying careful attention, but they had become hard of hearing, even deaf, or were simply not listening. How could they expect God's continued blessing when they had become closed to God's word? It was they, not God, who had unilaterally broken the covenant. So Jesus reiterated the importance of hearing, listening, reflecting, and responding, sometimes reminding them of previous warnings about their deafness and hardness of heart (Matt 13:15).

Mary, So Human Because Such an Attentive Listener

Mary is the first person in the gospels to be deeply attuned and attentive to God's word and the promptings of God's Spirit. The incarnation is the greatest of mysteries, in fact, a double mystery. And Mary was most intimately involved in its unfolding. The first element of the double mystery is that God, pure spirit, becomes human—truly, really, fully human. God becomes

human! This sounds like an oxymoron and defies description and understanding because it is a mystery. The second element is no less unfathomable if more simply put: a young girl with no sexual experience becomes pregnant and gives birth to a child. How? There's the mystery.

But we humans are fascinated by mysteries and love to struggle with them. For a thousand years and more, artists—particularly painters but also writers and sculptors—have been mesmerized by these twin mysteries: how the doubly impossible becomes actual, real. How—*on earth*—can this be? That is the question humans wrestle with. Paintings of the annunciation, the very moment when both mysteries happened (if a mystery "happens"), are to be found in the hundreds. Look very closely, and it is possible to understand how the artists attempted to say the unsayable, using images rather than words.

The scene is familiar: Mary is praying devoutly, usually on her knees. The angel Gabriel is in the picture, sometimes depicted with a billowing robe, translucent wings, and a *bandolero*—a kind of floating streamer on which are the words, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee." More rarely, the streamer bridges the gap between the angel and Mary, curling this way and that and ending behind or around Mary's head. At the top or in the corner of the painting is depicted a dove, the Holy Spirit, with radiating beams of light (the Seven Gifts of the Spirit, or the Twelve Fruits, for people with imagination). But look where these rays are pointing, and once in a while the ray at the very center points directly at, and even appears to enter, Mary's ear. In some paintings that *bandolero,* the streamer containing Gabriel's message, also points to, and even enters, Mary's ear!

Here is the heart of the mystery as depicted in art. Mary, thought the medievals—and this is no laughing matter—conceived via her ear. The words of the angel emblazoned on the *bandolero* and/or the light of the Spirit entering Mary's ear indicate that she *heard* Gabriel's word, symbolized by the Spirit as the dove. Having heard, she then internalized the word, and for nine months she pondered, contemplated—actually gestated—

the word. Finally she gave birth; and "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." It's a beautiful, subtle, and unforgettable image.

But there is more. As a missionary in West Africa, I lived with the Mende people of Sierra Leone. The word Mende itself is a composite of two words, *me*, meaning "to listen" or "hear," and *nde*, meaning "to speak." The people always said they listened first and only spoke later (a gentle rebuke to my peremptory tendencies). But the word *nde* means not only "to speak" but also "word." And *nde* means not only "word" and "to speak" but also "child." Just as a speaker produces or gives birth to words, so a mother produces and gives birth to a child. The mystery of the birth of Jesus seemed rather less of a mystery to the Mende people than to me: they could see quite easily that Mary uttered, brought forth, gave birth to the Word, the Logos, in the person of her child in the flesh. But she had first to hear the word before she could reproduce, bring forth, and give birth to the Word. Because she listened intently, God's voice reached her ear and her womb, via angel and Holy Spirit. Having heard, she spoke the *Magnificat.*

What Is Discipleship?

Jesus said some curious things, including the statement that those who heard the word of God and lived it were his siblings or mother. Far from demeaning his family, this is enormously encouraging for the rest of us. Another curious statement is addressed to his Father, his *Abba*, whom he addresses and thanks for "hid[ing] these things from the wise and the intelligent and reveal[ing] them to infants" (Matt 11:25).[1] The key to understanding this is found in the meaning of the word "disciple." It simply means "a learner" or "to learn," as an apprentice would. Occurring more than 250 times in the New Testament, it is a key word for Jesus. A disciple or learner is not independent but

[1] The contrast here is between "the wise" (as the "worldly wise" who think they have nothing to learn) and "infants" (a word meaning "non-speaker"; those with a whole world of learning potential ahead).

part of a relationship: a learner needs a teacher. A teacher with no pupils (learners) is impossible, and anyone without a teacher is not a learner in biblical terms. In the gospels and rabbinic literature, there are no self-taught disciples, and every rabbi or teacher must have disciples as a matter of professional honor; without disciples, a rabbi is incomplete.

When Jesus says "I thank you father . . . because you have hidden these things," he is using hyperbole, exaggeration, to point at those who think of themselves as "learned" or having nothing left to learn; such people simply cannot be taught. The significance of Jesus' words is that the only people excluded from discipleship are those who willfully refuse it. In contrast to those who think they know it all, Jesus says that his *Abba* reveals himself to little children or "infants," a term he often also applies to the Twelve, to remind them that they still have much to learn. In this context, infants or little children are those with the potential to become learners, those with such a long way to go, such a lot to learn.

In the very next sentence Jesus says, "Take my yoke," and, pointedly, "Learn *from me.*" This is the only path to discipleship: learning from the teacher, Jesus. He does not say "learn *about* me" but "learn *from* me." To learn about someone or something is "outer knowledge" or academic knowledge, intellectual or theoretical. "Inner" knowledge, by contrast, is direct or experiential knowledge. It is also called apprentice knowledge. To become a learner, a disciple, one needs experiential, hands-on, or apprentice knowledge. This, of course, is how Jesus himself became a carpenter—not by reading books, but by sitting with and standing by the side of Joseph, who taught him directly, until he knew *about* carpentry and came to *know carpentry* firsthand.[2] Academic or outer knowledge of God is theology. But a theology degree is no passport to heaven or remotely sufficient for discipleship, which entails accepting the invitation to come to know God and follow Jesus. Like Mary.

[2] See quotation on apprentice learning from AG 14 in chap. 2, footnote 2 above.

Yoke, Cross, and Sword

"Take my yoke," said Jesus—adding with dark humor, "for my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt 11:29, 30). The Twelve at first seem to have taken him literally, thinking they were in for an easy ride. Peter could hardly wait to leave nets and boats, to get away from the smell, the chafing, and the monotony. And James and John were simply not listening when Jesus tried to tell them about the road to Calvary and the betrayal, the beatings, and the barbaric death he would face: "Let us sit, one at your right and one at left, in your glory," they asked with breathtaking naïveté, to which Jesus replied, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?" With the arrogance of the truly empty-headed, they unhesitatingly replied: "We are able!" (Mark 10:38-40). When the other ten heard this, they were indignant, not because of James and John's presumption, but because they had preempted them!

Jesus had indeed promised Peter a disciple's reward—the "hundredfold"—but among the list of rewards he inserted the phrase, "with persecution" (Mark 10:30). But nobody was listening so they neither heard nor internalized. But Mary did. She came to know only too well "persecutions" of many forms, and she accepted them with quite astonishing faith and fortitude. She was a listener, a learner, and a true disciple, following the Way of Jesus throughout her life. After losing her twelve-year-old for three days and being sick with worry, she heard Jesus seeming to make light of her fears. The gospel says, "They [she and Joseph] did not understand what he said." But after they returned to Nazareth, "his mother [Joseph is not mentioned] treasured all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:51-52). Mary never stopped learning. That is an essential component of her discipleship: her fierce faithfulness until the end. She would need that commitment, because this was not the last time she would lose him.

Before Jesus was presented in the temple, Mary had already taken up the cross. Then Simeon took the child from her arms and told her things would not improve. The shocking truth was this: "A sword will pierce your own soul too," he said (Luke 2:35).

It had pierced her from the annunciation and its immediate aftermath as an unwed mother, to the humiliating and undignified birth in a cave or cattle shed outside the city. It would pierce her again when she lost him as a youth and keenly when he left for his ministry along the highways and byways. With shattering intensity it pierced her as she watched him carrying his cross, being brutally nailed down, and slowly dying, naked and virtually alone—again outside the city walls where criminals were dispatched, and abandoned by all, except one of the apostles, and the "many women," those ever-faithful disciples. Yes, she knew the meaning of those two marks of discipleship: taking the yoke and carrying the cross. And she was run through with a double-edged sword of sorrow that would have broken most people, yet she remained by the cross, holding his cold and bloody corpse in her arms and knowing, now, the true cost of discipleship. Jesus said once, "It is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher" (Matt 10:24). In this case the son grew to be like his mother, as she continued to grow more like her own son.

Mary and the Making of a Disciple

To appreciate how Mary became the first disciple and the model for all, we must trace her rapid rise to maturity. If she was little more than fourteen and perhaps younger at the annunciation, then long before she was twenty she had become a subject of slanderous gossip. A hastily betrothed girl, mother, refugee, migrant, and "undocumented alien," she would become, after Joseph's death (tradition suggests), the single mother of a growing youth with a character and mission she could not hope to fathom. But her strength of character had been apparent from the first intimations of her own vocation. Gabriel burst on the scene and declared without preamble that she was God's highly favored one. Little wonder she was "much perplexed," as St. Luke tells us (1:29), but the angel has hardly even begun. After telling her not to be afraid (a little like Jesus telling the apostles in the sinking boat exactly the same thing; Matt 14:28) Gabriel says: "Behold!

[Pay careful attention! Look! See!] You will conceive in your womb and bear a son" (Luke 1:31). This is the most important moment of Mary's young life. Later Jesus would declare, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock" (Matt 7:24), compared to a foolish person who does not listen and builds on sand. Mary's attention and decisiveness at this point is utterly rock-like. Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, on Marian devotion, states: "Mary is held up as an example, not precisely for the type of life she led, and much less for the socio-cultural background in which she lived, but rather for the way she fully and responsibly accepted the will of God, because she *heard* the word of God and *acted* on it. She is worthy of imitation because she was the first and most perfect of Christ's disciples."

Having thoroughly shocked Mary by informing her that she was about to become pregnant, and before explaining who her child would be, Gabriel tells her that *she* will be the one to name the child! This too is quite extraordinary in a culture where women have no authority to do any such thing. But Matthew's account is clear: it is *Joseph* who is the subject of the angelic visitation; Joseph who is told explicitly (in a dream, we may note) that Jesus will be conceived by the Holy Spirit and will save his people (Matt 1:20-21); and Joseph who is authorized to name the child. Not so in Luke's account where Mary, having been given this momentous news and asked simply how it could be (unlike Zechariah, whose question, "How can I be sure of this?" lacked the innocence and trust implicit in Mary's response). When the angel explained the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit and God's omnipotence, her *fiat*—"Here I am; let it be"—stands forever as the most perfect faith response and the epitome of discipleship's willingness to be led by the teacher and taught God's ways.

Mary's astonishing maturity is next captured when her cousin Elizabeth declares her "blessed" because she "believed that the promise made her by God would be fulfilled" (Luke 1:45), whereupon Mary speaks—utters, gives birth to—her *Magnificat*, showing she understands precisely who she is. Having proclaimed

God's greatness, she identifies herself as God's lowly servant. Though all generations will call her blessed, it is certainly not her own status but God's initiative that she emphasizes. God's mercy is everlasting and God's power unassailable. But Mary's acknowledgment of her own instrumentality is critical: God is the agent, Mary the instrument. However sophisticated an instrument may be, it can be a dead thing without the artist, the creator. Her response and attitude are totally consistent with an authentic understanding of discipleship: the disciple is not greater than the teacher, and the disciple has no business to be complacent and every reason to defer to God's empowering grace.

Mary's proclamation that God "has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant" is breathtakingly honest, both humbly proud and proudly humble, only possible for one intimate with God and with inspired self-awareness. For anyone this would be astonishing; for a young, untutored woman, it is magnificent. She has heard God's voice, internalized its message, and will give birth to pure truth. She is humbly proud because she is truly grounded, of the earth, the *humus*. This is true humility: "earthed," and not superficial, inflated, or unrealistic. She is also proud to be human. This is authentic pride: not vainglory or self-importance. She knows that she is God's creation, God is proud of her, and she can therefore take pride in what God is bringing to birth.

Mary, Model of Discipleship

The story of the wedding at Cana begins: "The mother of Jesus was there" (John 2:1). Another story of another woman also begins exactly the same way (Luke 13:10).[3] The Greek text reads simply, "And behold, a woman *was*." The past imperfect indicates determination, total presence, full commitment—not simply that she happened to be there. This is the same steadfastness Mary shows at Cana: "Behold, the mother of Jesus was there." She is so "there" that she is the first to notice a serious problem and

[3] This is the translation in NIV, NAB, and JB.

approaches Jesus with a statement, not a question. "They have no wine." In the Bible, wine in abundance signifies joy, enthusiasm, and hope, not frivolity but eschatological joy, a deep faith-filled expectation of the end times when God will be all in all and the scattered Tribes of Israel will be gathered again.[4] Lack of wine therefore indicates helplessness and hopelessness, a lack of zest or zeal, and a loss of faith and focus. "They have no wine" points to this kind of existential depletion that is pathological, a sickness. Even in the middle of a wedding feast, something fundamental is missing. Metaphorically, as the wine runs out, there is only emptiness, powerlessness, frustration.

Mary intuitively senses this and immediately takes an initiative. Although free-flowing wine symbolizes the Age of Messianic Fulfillment and Mary has no control over that (because it is God's time), she advocates with Jesus on behalf of the embarrassed host and disappointed guests. Jesus has to remind her, however, that God's time is *kairos* time, not chronological time: it cannot be anticipated or reckoned by rational means and is pure gift. He therefore says: "my time has not yet come" (John 2:4), a phrase he will repeat twice more.

When his disciples urge him to go to Judea and show his mighty deeds, he will say again: "My time has not yet come," and "I am not going to [Jerusalem for] this festival, for my time has not yet fully come" (John 7:6, 8). A little later when he is preaching in the treasury, no one arrested him because "his time had not yet come" (John 8:20). But here at Cana, despite his tentativeness, Mary has no doubts about his compassionate heart and deep concern. She simply pursues her quest by saying to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). We know the outcome: not only wine, but superabundance.[5] But Jesus did not grandstand by crudely drawing attention to himself. He instructed the servants to fill the large water jars. He sought their

[4] The stimulus for this reflection was one of Ronald Rolheiser's syndicated columns.

[5] By my calculation, this was the equivalent of 768 standard bottles of wine.

cooperation and also the available water as the primary material for the transformation.

Mary's intuition is profound, and Jesus' response is profoundly instructive: she has implicit faith in Jesus, while he involves local people and materials. She knows her son well: he is no cheap miracle worker. In fact he will often admonish people not to speak of his miracles. What he is looking for is faith, because it is faith that makes miracles, but miracles alone rarely make faith. Mary's faith is profound, but she is not so jealous of it that she cannot try to stimulate faith and trust in others. "Do whatever he tells you" is advice not only for the servants at Cana. It is an invitation and advice, wrapped around an implicit promise, to anyone who, like herself, has ears to hear, to reflect, and to respond. She is the disciples' disciple, the example to us all.

One more image can and should remain with us: Mary is the *stabat mater dolorosa*, the sorrowful mother who stood fast, the faithful mother who suffered in sorrow: "Standing near the cross of Jesus [was] his mother" (John 19:25). The word that fits Mary perfectly here is "steadfast": utterly committed, absolutely loyal. By that time, the men who had thought so well of themselves had fled, including Peter. He had rashly contradicted Jesus' prediction of wholesale betrayal, declaring grandiosely, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you" (Matt 26:33). But he did, and they did, but Mary never did. She did not simply *know about* Jesus; she knew him far more intimately than the other disciples. He was, after all, her son, her own flesh and blood.

A shockingly pointed poem by Frances Croake Frank puts it memorably:

> Did the woman say,
> when she held him for the first time
> in the dark dank of the stable,
> after the pain and the bleeding and the crying,
> "This is my body; this is my blood"?
>
> And did the woman say,
> when she held him for the last time

in the dark rain on a hilltop,
after the pain and the bleeding and the dying,
"This is my body; this is my blood?"

Well that she said it to him then,
for dry old men, brocaded robes belying barrenness,
ordain that she shall not say it for him now.[6]

This is stark, almost scandalous—and it touches a nerve, painfully but unerringly.

Lifelong Learners: Lessons for Ourselves

Mary the mother of Jesus has attracted poets and scholars for centuries. Some of the great hymns and homilies, sermons and treatises have ensured that the literature on Mary is vastly greater than the historical record itself. But much of it endures because Mary is such a model of discipleship. What can we take away to ponder and reflect on that might sustain and underwrite our own poor efforts at discipleship?

Perhaps above all else Mary is a model of faith in action: not wordy and never self-focused, she is to be found most often withdrawn and silent. But her actions speak louder than any commentator's or homilist's words ever could. In a world inundated with noise and bombast, we need fewer words and greater witness. She neither sought nor took places or positions of honor, but she was there, profoundly present, from first to last. Mary is an example to us all.

Second, not only is she present physically at the moments of greatest drama in the whole New Testament—from the annunciation and visitation, through the nativity and presentation in the temple, to Cana and the crucifixion—but her physical presence and steadfastness are the outward signs of her fierce faithfulness, her unswerving fidelity to her *fiat* and her fate. Mary is humble

[6] Frances Croake Frank, in *Celebrating Women*, ed. Hannah Ward, Jennifer Wild and Janet Morley (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1986). Used by permission.

and effacing, yet a great and monumental witness to her own faith and to her son and savior.

Stand immediately beneath the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral in London and then look down around your feet, and you find yourself standing in a circle inscribed with the same words that are etched on the wall of the crypt alongside the tomb of Christopher Wren, the architect of this great building. They say, *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice* ("If you are looking for a monument [to Wren, just] look around you").

We could almost apply these words to Mary in the New Testament and in the history of Christianity over the past two thousand years. She is not with us in the flesh, but her legacy is evergreen. Hers is not an easy example to follow—any more than Christopher Wren's was. But every Gothic cathedral ever built was dedicated to Mary because every Christian community knew her worth. And her daily commitment in good times and in terrible times stands as another monument of true discipleship that we can do more than simply admire: we can strive to emulate in our own, perhaps humdrum, lives.

Finally, Mary is a reminder that, for Jesus, discipleship was indeed radically inclusive and radically equal. "My mother and my brothers [and sisters] are those who hear the word of God and do it," said Jesus (Luke 8:21). His mother was unique and special, but so is each of us. There is no hierarchy of dominance in the community of Jesus. He even refuses to single out his own mother for preferential treatment. And though none of us should expect preferential treatment, we, like Mary, are certainly not inconsequential. We cannot, of course, do everything, but every one of us can do something, something nobody else in the world can do. But we must do what we can, because if we are to be disciples like Mary, we have the ability to do what we must. We can listen: we can hear, internalize, reflect, and respond. Like Mary, we can speak and even give birth to words of truth and lives of integrity. And if we have even a fraction of Mary's faith and faithfulness, we can make Mary's words our own: "The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is [God's] name" (Luke 1:49).

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"BY THIS, EVERYONE WILL KNOW YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES"

(John 13:35)

WOULD JESUS RECOGNIZE TODAY'S CHURCH?

What Would Be Recognizable?

As stated, the question "would Jesus recognize today's church?" might sound catchy but is purely hypothetical and, of course, anachronistic. Therefore our topic needs some clarification. My concern is not to enquire whether Jesus would recognize the church as it exists and operates today in the United States, Africa, Asia, or elsewhere but to identify what, in the contemporary global church, Jesus might acknowledge and approve of and what he might find inconsistent with his own ideas and example. Such a question might provide us with a helpful reflection on what we believe to be constitutive of the one, true church and spur us to reevaluate how we live the faith we profess.

The man Jesus, the Galilean Jew, distanced from our contemporary world by two thousand years and by unimaginable social, scientific, and religious ferment, could not possibly have imagined the twenty-first-century world with its electricity and electronics, its manpower and nuclear power, its corruption and pollution—let alone the institutional church with its vast cathedrals and bureaucracies, its hierarchical and patriarchal structures,

its sin and its grace. So we will try to identify, in today's church, authentic signs of the legacy of Jesus, examples of his ministry, and attempts to midwife the kingdom or realm of God here "on earth, as it is in heaven."

Three focal questions can help shape our search. First, is it reasonable to imagine that if Jesus were visiting today he would recognize those of us who call ourselves Christian? Would he identify us as members of a community of people who strive to deny our false egotistical selves[1] in order to take up, on a daily basis, the cross of which he spoke and on which he died? Second, to rephrase the question, would Jesus recognize us by our love for one another, demonstrated in mutual forbearance and forgiveness, concern and compassion for each other? And third, would Jesus approve of the way we relate to people who do not share, and sometimes oppose, our convictions about truth, about the church, and about the Way of Jesus?

The Body of Christ in Today's World

When Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the mountain, "he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white" (Matt 17:2). This was Jesus' body transfigured and radiant. Not long afterward, that body would be scourged, bloodied, humiliated, and nailed to a tree to die in ignominy. The very same body that had been so recently transfigured was now shamefully and cruelly abused. Saint Paul knew the story and yet called the early Christian community "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" to be transformed. It's almost the reverse of what happened to Jesus: we start with our sinful bodies but look forward to their

[1] Anselm Grün cites C. G. Jung, who "says that in the first half of life it is important to develop a strong ego; in the second half one centers on the Self. But that does not mean that the ego is entirely gone. Jesus says, 'Deny yourself,' which means: distance yourself from your ego. Get free of your ego." David Steindl-Rast and Anselm Grün, *Faith beyond Belief: Spirituality for Our Times* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 20.

final transfiguration. And of course Paul emphasizes that we *are* the body of Jesus the Christ (Rom 12:4-21). As a body is composed of many parts with different functions, so we, as church, are called to constitute one recognizable body in and through our great diversity. But Paul calls us, in that passage, to be recognizably Christ's body by our practices of generosity, compassion, cheerfulness, love, zeal, hope, patience, perseverance, forgiveness, service, and corporal works of mercy (vv. 9-21). So we ask again: would Jesus recognize the church today?

The church we know and of which we form part has a history of heroism and hatred, virtue and vice, forgiveness and vengeance, and everything in between. We have the capacity to reflect aspects of Jesus' life in our own everyday lives, but we have also proven time and again that we are more recognizable in the person and actions of Pilate or Judas than as disciples of Jesus. There are today more than forty-five thousand entities, groups, sects, denominations, and churches that claim allegiance to the life, teachings, and memory of Jesus, but far from gracious or tolerant toward each other.[2] We who are nominally the body of Christ are not one body in the Lord but feeble, flawed, and fragmented. Formally united by our common claims on one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, we are divided by history, creed, and witness and have killed each other in Christ's name. This scandal would surely make us unrecognizable as disciples were Jesus to walk our streets or visit our places of worship. Even St. Paul's fractious Corinthian community relations seem more like a minor family tiff by comparison (1 Cor 11).

"You Will Know Them by Their Fruits" (Matt 7:16)

If, when, and wherever this church of ours is to be found in the fabric of fine and splendid buildings designated as landmarks or world heritage sites; if it is manifest in episcopal palaces and

[2] For information on Global Christianity, see http://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/index.cfm.

other opulent ecclesiastical residences; if it is an institution run like a multinational company or corporation whose senior executives are unavailable for the needs of ordinary people; and if its officeholders cling to their distinguished honorific titles and relish the pomp and circumstance associated with color-coded clerical costumery, then Jesus would only recognize this church as bogus and hypocritical. Chapter 23 of Matthew's gospel is a litany of righteous anger and criticism placed on the lips of Jesus and directed at his own religious leaders. It is ironic that its rejection of special titles, dogmatism, and ostentatious behavior has been noted by the church but deflected and directed at others, while churchmen have often failed to identify bombast, ostentation, dogmatism, or careerism much closer at hand.

But if, when, and wherever this church of ours is outgoing, outreaching, boundary-crossing, and dedicated to encountering "the other"; if its people are missionary and missional disciples, co-missioned and sent by the Spirit; if it strives to be a reconciling, healing, forgiving community of women and men (Matt 18); and inasmuch as it is a church of equals where no one is excluded or demeaned and where there is no moral distinction between women and men, clergy and laity, managers and workers, or rich and poor (as called for in Gal 3:26-29), then Jesus would most certainly acknowledge and endorse that these are excellent examples of what he had in mind.

We could continue to identify fruits—good and bad, succulent and poisonous—that grow within the Christian community and its individual members, so that our original question is no longer quite so hypothetical. When Jesus spoke of true and false prophets as recognizable by their fruits, he continued the metaphor by asking rhetorically, "Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?" He proceeded to say that "a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit" and concluded with a grim warning: "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits" (Matt 7:16-20). On another occasion, however, he told a parable about (the bad) weeds growing among the (good)

wheat and the laborers asking the landowner whether to gather them. He replied, "No, for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burnt" (Matt 13:29-30). Therefore, we need to be very circumspect about the fruits we produce and take great care to avoid both scandal and hypocrisy. Just because we have not personally been publicly identified as shallow, selfish, and less than fruitful is no reason to be complacent. There is always more for disciples to strive for. So it would be worthwhile for us to continue to ask if, and by what criteria, Jesus would acknowledge or repudiate our church as it is found today.

If the church, as it exists in any particular locality (whether national, regional, diocesan, or parochial), community, or individual, is so settled and comfortable as to have lost its commitment to outreach and encounter with poor and needy people, that is, if it has lost its missional dimension; if it has become a church of maintenance rather than mission, self-focused and self-protective, narrowly dogmatic and concerned more about doctrine (orthodoxy) than virtuous living (orthopraxy); and if it is more critical of others than of itself, then it is not inspired by the Spirit and life of Jesus and surely not something he could endorse and encourage.

Jesus was noted, and criticized, for his ministry of radical inclusion, declaring that nobody was beyond the reach of God's mercy and love. But he was operating in a religious world that had created and defended various degrees of exclusion, purity, shunning, and judgmentalism. Yet for Jesus, people widely regarded as sinners to be shunned, or poor people to be marginalized were his preferred option. So where do we and our church stand today? Have we re-created some of the very conditions Jesus denounced? Have we become a club where many—particularly women, poor people, or loyal dissenters—are muted and marginalized, literally overlooked or undervalued? Because a church that publicly identifies who can and who cannot come to

the table; that summarily excommunicates those who try to follow conscience and Master; that forbids people even to talk about certain topics relating to sex and gender, ministry, and authority: this is not at all what Jesus gave his life for, nor is it remotely the kind of example he left us.

By contrast, however, wherever today's church is identifiable in communities of faith where poor people, immigrants, muted and marginalized groups are welcomed, embraced, and healed together; where church members know they are called to be servants and friends; where scattered and needy people gather to celebrate reconciliation, break bread, and be fed and then be scattered again in the name of Jesus; and where people hunger for the bread of justice and thirst for God's righteousness (Isa 58), then Jesus would affirm, approve, and encourage community members to remain courageous and faithfully steadfast.

Because every culture on earth contains both sin and grace, in greater or lesser amounts, from scarcity to abundance, the responsibility of Christians everywhere is to strive to minimize the sin so that grace may abound. Saint Paul is both clear and lyrical on this point: "Just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. . . . Just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might exercise dominion through justification, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. . . . Should we continue to sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?" (Rom 5:19–6:2). Consequently, if today's church (through its members) is shining or radiating, not its own light, but the reflected light that flows from the triune God; if it is pointing, not to itself, but to someone much more trustworthy and faithful, our brother Jesus, the Living Christ; if it is defending, not just its own interests, but those of oppressed and marginalized persons without discrimination; and if it is upholding, not just its own rights or only those of the unborn, but every person's right to life "from conception to natural death," then we can be confident that Jesus would recognize its faithfulness to his teaching and his mission.

The church must never allow itself to become complacent or to stand still. If it is not stagnating or living in the past, it will be living and life-giving, growing as a company of believers truly united in faith and practice (Acts 2:42-47). It will then be a beacon of hope for a confused, darkened, directionless world (1 Pet 1:3-12; 3:15), an extended and diverse family of many different persons and opinions but bonded in love and real respect (John 13:34), an example of authentic ecumenical cooperation and unity (John 17:11, 20-24), and a community marked by repentance and continuous conversion to Christ and to the world. Finally, this church would be a model of radical equality and real cooperation between women and men (Phil 2:1-5), opposed to all social and legal discrimination based on age, gender, ethnicity, economic or professional status, or manner of Christian living. This is indeed a tall order, but it represents a Jesus vision of his community, the *ekklesia*, the church. And it would be something he would not simply recognize; for wherever this image of church is realized, Jesus himself will already be there, truly present in word, in the sacrament of the breaking of bread, and in the members of a faithful community—his own body here on earth.

Questions to Ponder

As we consider the challenge of Jesus and our own responses to it as Christian disciples and as members of the church, we can generate some specific questions that would give us pause and perhaps refocus us on the call to authentic discipleship.

First, given the millions of nominal Christians in the United States or wherever we practice our faith, how many of them, of us, are truly *confirmed* Christians, really *firm* in our faith? Is our faith, and not simply our faith in or adherence to dogmas, but in and to Jesus the Christ, so worth living for that we might even be willing to die for it, for him?

Second, is my own parish or faith community really a community marked by common aims and common means? Is it perhaps more like an association of individuals or families, each

living more or less religiously and keeping the commandments? Or is it dying on the vine for lack of common focus and zeal or because it forgot or never understood that to be Christian is to be a disciple and to be a disciple is to be missional, or a missionary disciple?

Third, am I, personally, truly a Christian, or simply a (Roman) Catholic? A Catholic might be defined as a member of a particular group with its own particular identity and rules, but a Christian should be understood to be an authentic follower of Jesus the Christ, not defined or confined by liturgical practice or religious rules. Do I attend church regularly, or do I truly hunger and thirst for God's justice? Do I "religiously" make regular financial contributions, or do I actually serve other people and attempt to make a difference in their lives?

And a fourth question: am I willing to try a thought-experiment, to place myself at the Last Judgment as described in the gospel (Matt 25:31-46) and ask whether I would—at the very moment I am reading these words—be placed among the sheep or the goats? When Jesus said, "I was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, and in prison," would he also say he had encountered me? In the final analysis, those are the criteria for judging whether he would recognize his church in you, in me, and in us.

Diagnosis and Prognosis

Institutionally, the Body of Christ—the church—is quite sick in many regions and according to many criteria. There are clear signs of sclerosis (hardening of tissues), arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat), carcinoma or sarcoma (cancerous or malignant growth), and general lassitude or weariness, manifesting itself in short-temperedness, intolerance, and ungraciousness. Evidence of clericalism (which Pope Francis frequently identifies and exposes as a malignancy), dogmatism, and authoritarianism indicate a lack of interior well-being and suppleness and a compulsive need to control others. Given the institutional failure to acknowledge the real causes, immense side effects, and devastating results

of decades of clerical sexual abuse, and thus an inability to face reality and to be truly contrite, the prognosis is bleak.

Furthermore, internal distress is matched by visible evidence of profuse hemorrhaging, as the numbers of Catholics previously affiliated and practicing within faith communities continues to decline precipitately with no signs of any effective control of this mortal crisis. The institutional Church is in dire and urgent need of healing, while some of its most senior leaders fail to acknowledge or adequately address the crisis. Apart from an urgent and profound need for repentance at the level of every diocese and religious order, there is only one hope of survival: invocation of the promise of Jesus that the Spirit would not fail.

An organization or institution that is not a community is not the church, or the *ekklesia* (a community with a mission, called to be sent), Jesus had in mind. A community that is not missional is not the true church. Jesus' disciples were striving to become a community, but Jesus was not looking for a crowd of individualists. A church that does not risk engaging in downward mobility, boundary crossing, inclusiveness, and mutuality or mutual interdependence is not the church Jesus preached or lived and died for.

The Prologue of John's gospel is both a challenge and a great source of hope: "[Jesus] came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1:11-12). When our day comes, may we be recognizable to Jesus, his *Abba*, and his abiding Spirit as daughters and sons of God.

There is a story with variants in all four gospels, which in Mark's account concerns an anonymous, holy, faith-filled woman who anoints Jesus' head with precious oils. Having commended her several times, Jesus says, "Wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told *in memory of her*" (Mark 14:9). Although these words echo—and surely not by chance—the very words of Jesus in Luke's gospel ("Do this *in memory of me*"; Luke 22:19), the woman and her act of faith have signally not been remembered. We remember, of

course, the story of another woman, specified as a sinner, who washes Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-50), or yet another scenario in the house of his friend Mary of Bethany (*not* Mary Magdalene, who nowhere appears in these accounts) who anoints his feet (John 12:1-8). But on no Sunday assembly in the whole three-year cycle[3] do we read the story of the model disciple whom Jesus approved wholeheartedly and demanded that we should remember always! Would he recognize a church that has effectively erased her memory and only tells the story of a "sinful woman" who anointed his feet as a slave might do? Would he recognize a church that forbids any conversation, much less dialogue, about the right of women of faith to perform priestly acts like anointing and only recently permitted discussion about women deacons?

Reformulating the Question

In what way could a first-century Palestinian Jew possibly recognize a twenty-first-century American, Asian, or African member of the church, when the world and human cultures have changed so much? We might as well ask whether our grandparents would recognize their great-grandchildren. It very much depends on what we understand by the words "recognize" and "church."

Jesus, arguably, never intended to found a church as we now know it. To complicate matters further, the church is a mystery and yet at the same time we are the church! So would Jesus recognize—in this church as we know it—elements of what he worked to generate, or transmit, or teach, or even establish? Specifically, would he recognize—in your life, my life, our life—the fruit that he was hoping for when he planted the seeds?

"You will know them by their fruits," said Jesus (Matt 7:16). But he also reminded them, "You did not choose me but I chose

[3] The single exception being Passion Sunday, Year B, when this story forms the opening of the passion narrative but is usually overlooked and virtually never preached on, except when it is a core text at the ordination of women in various Christian churches.

you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last" (John 15:16-17). And in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-12), Jesus elaborates, speaking about being poor in spirit, gentle, hungry for justice, merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers, but he also speaks of being persecuted. The question is simply: are we bearing fruits such as these? The answer is not so simple, especially in light of Luke's warnings to the complacent (Luke 6:24-26) who are rich, full, laughing, and well thought of. Are we among these people, and what are we prepared to do if we are?

"Do Not Quench the Spirit"

Jesus promised that the Spirit would be in charge: "It is to your advantage that I go away; I will send the Advocate to you" (John 16:7). Not long afterward, Stephen warned, "Do not stifle [quench/grieve] the Spirit" (Acts 7:51; also 1 Thess 5:19). Yet the danger is always there, that instead of the Spirit leading and speaking for the church, the church seizes initiatives that do not belong to it and presumes to speak for the Spirit instead of listening and obeying the Spirit.

Jesus would surely approve of the many ways in which Christians are attempting to discern the Spirit and be firm in their baptismal commitment as missionary disciples. But this is by no means a time for casualness, given the terrible acts of inhumanity perpetrated by so many religious people, explicitly invoking God's name as they do so. We must stay awake and be on the alert, lest we allow the gospel to lose its sharp edge at the expense of the world in which we live, the people who struggle against injustice, the witness of Jesus, and our own vocation as members of his body. We are always in need of a new Pentecost: "Come, Holy Spirit."

SCRIPTURE INDEX

Genesis
1:27 98
1:31 50

Psalms
116 71

Isaiah
40:31 193
44:22 211
46:3-4 211
49:15 211
61:1-4 25

Jeremiah
20:7-10 165

Matthew
1:20-21 218
4:1-10 68–69
5:3-12 234
7:5 114
7:16 226–27, 233
11:25ff. 18, 214
12:30 115
13:15 211
13:29 228
14:15, 17 65
14:28 20
14:33 8, 20
16:22 65
17:2 225
18:1, 21 138
19:26 xii
20:20 8
23:1-12 227
23:10 20
25:31-46 89, 231
26:20-29 62
26:39 63

Mark
1:15 28
1:38 144
3:21 194–209 passim
3:28-30 24
3:35 210
5:29 25
5:43 5
6:3, 31 10
6:34 6
6:37 6, 79
6:43 10
6:48 3–16
6:49-50 11
6:51 7
6:51-52 20
6:52 8, 11
7:24 6
9:29 14, 29, 65
9:40 115
10:17 138
10:27 10, 90, 111
10:28-45 65
10:30 52, 209
10:35-40 9, 52, 216
10:41 52
10:43 4, 46
10:51 27
11:28 127
12:28 138
13:11 11, 163–77, 184
14:9 232
14:27 189

Luke
1:29-31 217–18
1:45 218
1:49 223
2:35 216
2:51 216
4:16-20 29
5:32 59
6:7, 11 25
6:10 17–30
6:24-26 108

6:27-30 127
7:36-50 233
8:21 223
9:50 115
10:29 138
11:23 115
11:27 210
13:10-17 27
22:17-20 63
22:19 223
24:33 3, 31, 45
24:34 40

John
1:11-12 232
2:1 219
2:4-5 220
2:5 201ff., 210–23 passim
4:8 9, 23
4:10 50
4:27 108
5:7 27
5:8 27–30
6:35-69 9, 12, 55
11:16 40
11:27 65
12:1-8 233
13:3-15 8, 49, 62, 89
13:35 224–34 passim
14:16-17, 26 183
15:5, 8 xii
15:16-17 234
16:7 234
16:33 52, 54
17:11 20–24, 230
19:25 221

Acts of the Apostles
1:8 95–111 passim
1:10 44
2:42-47 230
4:34 57
7:51 234
9:36 9

Romans
8:31-5 206
12:4-21 226
14:4 114

1 Corinthians
11:23, 25 61–75 passim, 226
12:12-13 117

2 Corinthians
4:15 71

Galatians
3:24-28 23, 117, 227

Ephesians
2:1-3 118
2:11-16, 19 23, 119
3:16-19 151
5:15 178–93 passim

Philippians
2:1-5 118, 230
2:7-8 89

Colossians
3:11 117

2 Timothy
1:12 142

Hebrews
6:19 181
7:27 69
13:14 83

James
4:12 114

1 Peter
1:3-12 230
3:15 163, 230

Revelation
21:5 37

SUBJECT INDEX

adventure, 95ff.
Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), 17–20, 30, 59
authority, 131

belief/behavior, 132–36
boundaries, 111. *See also* margins

Cathars, 123–24
Catholic (Church), 56
charism, 201–5
commitment, 1–75
communion, 46–60
communitas, 168–70
conversion, 33ff.
cost-effectiveness, 188–91
crisis, 45, 52ff.
cultural anthropology, x
"cultural flaw," 97–99, 115, 118ff.
culture, ix–x, 144–59

Day, Dorothy, 171
definitions, 99. *See also* boundaries; margins
de Nobili, Roberto, 199–200
difference, 139–41
discipleship, xi–xii, 182
diversity, 120–59
domination, 45–60
"Do this," 49, 61–75

ears, 211–14
encounter, 110
evangelization, vii

faith. *See* belief/behavior
faith and culture, 144–59
fire, 157–59
foot-washing, 48–49, 111
Francis of Assisi, 156

gossip and gospel, 178–93, 191–92

heresy (orthodoxy), 124–25
Holy Spirit, 3–16, 166–70, 182–86, 192ff. *See also* wind
hope, 163–82. *See also* prophecy

identity, 3–78
Ignatius, 199–201
imagination, 174–76
inculturation, 150
insiders/outsiders, 100ff.
intercultural living, 147–48
Ite, Missa est, 61, 73

Jesus and margins/marginality, 106ff.

liminality, 84, 168. *See also* margins

madness, holy, 194–209; unholy, 195ff.
magisterium, 48–49
margins, 79–162, 177, 198; Jesus and margins, 106ff.; active and passive, 82ff.; positive and negative, 84ff.
Mary, 210–23
ministry, 48–51
missional, 37–39
missionary disciples, ix. *See also* Pope Francis
models of/for, 163–234
muted groups, 23

Nabi Yagba, 12–13
New Evangelization, vii–viii
"nobodies," 196
Nyimba (Nepal), 116

"other," 81, 86, 119–20
outsiders/insiders, 100ff.

participants/nonparticipants, 103ff.
Passover, 63ff.
pilgrimage, 95
Pokot (East Africa), 116
Pope Benedict XVI, 35, 139, 158
Pope Francis, viii, ix, 24, 29, 32, 34, 44, 48, 51, 54–55, 58–59, 73, 92, 139, 154, 172
Pope John Paul II, vii, 136, 157, 192
Pope Paul VI, 150–51, 218
power, 131
prophecy, 164–72. *See also* hope

religion, 128–43
representation, 23–24
restoration/renewal, 17–30
revelation, 136ff.
risk-taking, 163–77
Romero, Oscar, 156–57

sacrament, 74
sacrifice, 67–72; and stigma, 205–7
social institutions, 130–39
Spirit. *See* Holy Spirit; wind
Stang, Dorothy, 154
stigma, 205–7
stranger, 81ff., 104ff.
"Stretch out your hand," 17–30

Tabitha (disciple), 9
table-fellowship, 110–11
theosis, 70
transformation, 151–53
trust, 58ff.
twins, 115ff.

us/them, 46–60. *See also* "other"

Vanier, Jean, 18

Way of Jesus, 7, 41
WCC (World Council of Churches), 79–94
Wiebe, Rudy, 127
wind, 3–17, 56, 59

xenophobia, 120–22

zero-sum game, 47–48

AUTHOR INDEX

Allen, J., 158, 197, 208
Arnold, M., 187
Arrupe, P., 150
Austin, J., 98

Bellah, R., 134, 135
Bernanos, G., 205
Bevans, S., 110
Bonheoffer, D., 190
Brolley, M., 21
Brueggemann, W., 171–75
Bruteau, B., 25–29, 46ff., 59

Carroll, L., 179
Chittister, J., 158, 185–86, 192
Costas, O., 34

Dietterich, I., 182
Donohue, J. R., 5
Donovan, V., 137–42
Dorr, D., 34
Dupuis, J., 95

Eliot, T. S., 143, 163

Frank, F. C., 221–22
Friedan, B., 188
Fukuyama, F., 128–29

Gillman, J., 202
Gittins, A., 72, 90–91, 97, 105, 110, 147, 169
Gorringe, T. J., 174
Grün, A., 225

Hahn, S., 106
Hardy, T., 14–16
Harrington, D. J., 5
Harrison, B. W., 145
Hendry, G. S., 7
Hollenweger, W., 186
Huntingdon, S., 129

Johnston, D., 129

Karris, R., 67
Koyama, K., 105
Kreider, A., 120

Lamb, C., 48
Lee, J. Y., 83–84

McCulloch, D., 123
McMullen, R., 151
Meier, J., 82
Mitchell, N., 74, 202–4
Moloney, F., 156
Moore, R. I., 122–24
Moses, P., 156
Myers, C., 186, 188

Nin, A., 36, 205
Nolan, A., 195–96
Nouwen, H., 105, 198

Okoye, J., 209
O'Leary, D., 45
Osborne, K., 66, 74

Palmer, P., 181
Pilch, J., 194
Pongratz-Lippit, C., 158, 197
Pope Benedict XVI, 35, 139
Pope Francis, 24, 29, 32, 34, 54–55, 73, 92, 139, 154
Pope Paul VI, 150–51, 218
Prowse, Archbishop, 21

Saatchi, M., 191
Sacks, J., 112–14, 139–41, 146, 169, 175
Salinger, J. D., 170
Sampson, C., 129
Schroeder, R., 110
Sen, A., 84
Simmel, G., 96–97
Singleton, M., 124
Smith, W. C., 134–36
Sobrino, J., 157
Stark, R., 120, 126–27, 130, 140–41, 146, 190, 205–7
Steindl-Rast, D., 225
Stonequist, E., 83
Storr, A., 199–202
Sweetman, D., 9

Taylor, C., 126, 203–4
Tracy, D., 88, 113
Turner, V., 85, 94

van Gennep, A., 85

Wiesel, E., 197–98